A TREATISE ON THE ORIGIN AND EARLY HISTORY OF THE BENI-ISRAEL OF MAHARASHTRA STATE

By
SHELLIM SAMUEL, M.A., LL.B.

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By

SHELLIM SAMUEL, M.A., LL.B.,

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1963

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This book
is humbly dedicated
to
My Dear Father
the late Samuel Rahamim Isaac Pingle

FOREWORD

The author of this book deserves to be congratulated on the manner in which he has conducted research on the origin and early history of the Beni-Israel of Maharashtra State. I have gone through some of the chapters of the book, and I find them full of original research and references.

The Beni-Israel of Maharashtra State can trace their history back to 2,000 years, when their ancestors were shipwrecked on the shores of Navgaon, a village in the Konkan. They lived in friendship and co-operation with the local population and adapted themselves to their way of life. They took to agriculture and oil pressing, spoke Marathi and became a part and parcel of the country. In recent times, many of them have come down to Bombay. Some have taken up Government service, others are engaged in the teaching profession and business and a large number are employed in industries. They have also associated themselves with the Freedom Movement of the country.

A book on the origin and history of a people, who have found themselves after centuries, is certainly a fascinating study, and I am sure this book will afford a stand-by for more researches on the subject.

M. S. KANNAMWAR,
Chief Minister,
State of Maharashtra.

August 22, 1963.

AN APPRECIATION

I have been much impressed by the book "Treatise on the Origin and Early History of the Bene Israel of Maharashtra" by Mr. Shellim Samuel.

The author propounded an entirely new version regarding the period when the Bene Israel ancestors were shipwrecked on the shores of India and sets down the period to 732-730 B. C. when in the divided kingdoms of ancient Israel, Judah was under the reign of Ahaz, and Israel under Hashea. He clearly formulates the theory that the Bene Israel ancestors emanated from the Northern tribes of Asher and Zebulun.

The author treats the factual and historical aspects with great care and thought. It is in fact the first exact study in the yet barren field of research on this subject.

The chapter on the Cochin Jews is extremely well designed, and provides an insight into the ancient community of the Jews in South India. Very interesting also is the research made by the author in relation to the Ophir of the Bible.

With the forthcoming publication of the second Volume of the work "The Bene Israel of Maharashtra" covering the Mediaeval and modern periods, the reader will have the full story of the ancient Jewish Community of the Bene Israel and its glorious past, a story of a long journey of 2,000 years from the early times of its appearance on the coast of Konkan of Western India to the present days. A fascinating history of a microscopic minority in the ocean of various races, faiths and creeds which, with admirable courage and determination, has preserved its identity, remained true to its origin and faithful to the Rock of Israel.

H. CYNOWICZ, MAG. JUR.
President,
The Central Jewish Board of
Bombay.

PREFACE

The publication of this work was prompted by the birth of the "State of Israel" in the year 1948. Interest began to grow in that small limb of ancient Israel, the Beni-Israel of India, who in spite of the vicissitudes of time, have preserved the purity of their stock and the religious practices, tenets and faith of their fathers.

In the preparation of this work that masterpiece, "The History of the Jews" by Graetz, has been a stand-by of immense value. I have followed the chronology given by Graetz; it however conflicts to a considerable extent with that given by Hall in his "Ancient History of the Middle East" which is a work of great erudition. To attempt to reconcile the two may result in some confusion and I have thought it better to follow the dates given by the Jewish author, specially as references to his work are the more numerous.

A good deal of praise is also due to the versatile and gifted author, the late Mr. Samuel Hyam Kehimkar, whose book on "History of the Beni-Israel of the Bombay Presidency" has been a source of considerable inspiration and assistance. His treatment of the subject, both lucid and learned, has proved a work of reference, valuable and dependable, especially as preserving for posterity the social and religious practices of the Beni-Israel ancients, which would otherwise have lost their authoritative import, if not to have actually disappeared in the midst of time.

The penetrating exposition by the late Rev. Dr. John Wilson, D.D., of the Bombay Scottish Mission, in

the historical paper on the "Beni-Israel" which he read at the anniversary meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society, Bombay Branch, in 1838-39 and which is published in his book "The Lands of the Bible"(1) is also replete with information of the Beni-Israel ancients of inestimable value to the student—a thesis both erudite and reliable bearing as it does the imprint of great care and thought.

I may be permitted at this stage to refer to the region known as the "Bombay Konkan" which has been the home of the Beni-Israel since the earliest times. The Bombay Konkan is that strip of land of the Indian Peninsula on the western sea-board, as lies between Vassai (Bassein) to the north in Salsette Island and Honavar port to the south, in the North Kanara District —it includes Bombay and the territorial unit known as "Habsan", the principality of the Nawab of Janjira which is now merged in the Maharashtra State of the Indian Union. In length it is approximately a 100 miles, being 30 to 60 miles wide in parts. It is bounded on the west by the Arabian Sea and on the east by the Sayadhari Range of hills generally known as the Western Ghats. The sea coast is inhabited by the Son Kolis, a sturdy race of Dravidian origin, who follow the hereditary calling of fishermen. The somewhat elevated country on the fringe of the Ghats to the east, is the home of the Mahadeo Kolis, professional carriers in ancient days, of trade goods from the interior of the country to the ports on the western India sea-board and vice versa, via the two main passes piercing the Sayadhari Range known as the Bhore and Thull Ghats. The professional activities of the Mahadeo Kolis, which covered a period of over fifteen centuries, ceased gradually on the advent of railways and the provision of good roads in the ghat region under British aegis. They have as

(1) The lands of the Bible, Vol. II, pp. 667-676.

a consequence become cultivators of the soil. In between the Ghat regions and the sea coast, the general body of the inhabitants consists mainly of Maratha agriculturists, known as Kunbis, who live in villages. In their midst, in the near vicinity of the coastal belt, the Beni-Israel, a small entity of ancient Jewry, have found homes from time immemorial. As a virile surviving limb at the present day, of Israel of antiquity, their origin and history has a special interest for modern Jewry in general, and the community of the Beni-Israel in particular, as well as scholars and laymen historically minded, devoted to Biblical lore.

My grateful thanks are due to the late Mrs. E. Aaron Benjamin (Kandlekar) for placing her late husband's well stocked library at my disposal; to the late Dr. E. Moses (Rajpurkar), M.D., a former Mayor of Bombay, for the loan of a few volumes from his library; and to the late Rahamim J. Ezekiel (Rajpurkar), son of the late Mr. Joseph Ezekiel, Fellow of the University of Bombay, for various books from his father's library.

The narrative form of diction has been followed in this work as it most suited to the theme. For this I am grateful to the late Rev. Fr. H. Heras, S. J., Director of the Indian Historical Research Institute, St. Xavier's College, Bombay.

I shall always be happy to receive from my readers suggestions for the improvement of this work, and important historical facts for inclusion in future editions.

I have no doubt that readers will find the subject matter as set out in this work, as varied and fascinating as I found it, when I first undertook the preparation of this work.

I do not claim this work to be a perfect one, but I do offer it in the earnest hope that it will not only serve as a useful source of information, but as a stepping stone to further research on the subject. This work will be followed by the publication of "The Beni-Israel in Medieval and Modern Times".

SHELLIM SAMUEL.

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PART I

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

With the birth of the "State of Israel" in a part of Palestine on May the 15th 1948, as a result of the withdrawal of the British Mandatory rule over the country, world-wide interest has been aroused in the prophecies of the Jewish Sage, Isaiah. The Bible under missionary aegis in the 19th and 20th centuries, has penetrated many lands, translations thereof being made in practically every language of the civilised world. World Jewry in particular, has cause to remember the memorable lines in verses eleven and twelve of chapter eleven of the Book of Isaiah which read:—

xi—"And it shall come to pass that the Lord shall set his hand — to recover the remnant of his people which shall be left from Assyria and Egypt and from the islands of the sea".

xii—"And shall assemble the out-castes of Israel and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth".

The Bible in Kings I, chapters eleven and twelve, records the divisions into two kingdoms of the House of Israel after the death of King Solomon; northern Palestine occupied by the "Ten Tribes" being called "Israel" and the southern portion, peopled by the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, being known as "Judah". The period of this event was in the 10th century B.C. The respective rulers were Jeroboam and Rehoboam. The latter was a son of King Solomon, and against whom, when he suc-

ceeded his father as king, a revolt was engineered by the "Ten Tribes" under the leadership of Jeroboam who was elected king. While the "Ten Tribes" occupied land in fertile valleys and dwelt in towns, the land of Judah was stony and sterile. Jerusalem was the only large town and the people on this account, still clung to their old nomadic ways of life (1) (2). Jeroboam forbade the community of the "Ten Tribes" to worship at the Temple at Jerusalem, fearing that they would thus be induced to revert to the kingdom of Judah, the Royal House, and introduced idolatrous worship and other elements of the then Cannanitic heathen civilization (3). Under his successors the country went from bad to worse. Internal dissensions led to intestine conflicts which weakened the kingdom. Its relative wealth, with its busy markets and bristling cities, also attracted invasion of its territories by surrounding nations. Finally, about 732 B.C., the Assyrians captured Samaria, the capital of the "Ten Tribes", and carried the mass of the people into captivity and thus put an end to the kingdom of "Israel". The "Ten Tribes" were thus lost to history, their place being taken by Assyrian colonists who intermingled and intermarried with such of the Israelites as were left. The descendants of these colonists were, in later times, known as the Samaratans. The little kingdom of "Judah" survived for some one hundred and thirty years longer,

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(1) Breasted:— The Conquest of Civilization. The settlement of the Hebrews — p. 187.

(2) *Note*:— The appellative Jew derived from Judah, has been applied to the Hebrew race as a whole after the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel.

(3) Modern scholars are inclined to the more favourable view that the mode of worship instituted by Jeroboam was on parallel lines to that followed in the "Temple" at Jerusalem the two bull-calves serving merely as supports for the mercy seat, as distinct from the Cherubim which featured in the "Temple" at Jerusalem. See "Moses" by Martin Buber, Essay "The Bull and the Ark".

being exposed to repeated invasions on account of its position between the powerful states of Egypt and Assyria. It was faithful to the religion of its fathers. Jerusalem was made a strong fortress under King Hezekiah and an attack by the Assyrians under Sennacharib, repulsed. In the later reign of King Josiah, that monarch was killed in battle with the Egyptians and "Judah" was forced to become a tributary of Egypt. The weakened kingdom finally succumbed to the Chaldeans who had become a great world power. Jerusalem was captured by Nebuchadnazzar in 586 B.C., the Temple was destroyed, and most of the people were carried away into exile to Babylon.

Myth and legend ever associated with the mysterious, has, in the ages following, kept alive the disappearance into the void of the lost "Ten Tribes" of Israel — Judah on the other hand is easily identified in the community taken captive to Babylon and whose numerous descendants are to be found in the modern state of Iraq, the former Mesopotamia. In the background of the context herein, profound interest attaches to the small and enlightened community of Israelites in India known at the present day as the "Beni-Israel", most of whom are to be found in the cities and towns, large and small, in the Bombay(1) State, now Maharashtra State and in many villages on the Konkan coast, their original home. Are the "Beni-Israel" the lost sons of Israel? To what tribe did they belong? When and in what circumstances

(1) *Note*:— The name Bombay is derived from MAMBAI, the goddess worshipped by the "Son Kolis" or fishermen who originally occupied the seven islands now comprised in the main City limits as distinct from Greater Bombay. A temple now stands on the site of the ancient shrine and is called Mambadevi temple open to all Hindus. It is near the Moti (Pearl) Bazaar, off the Kalbadevi Road.

and where from did they first come to India? What is their history? Such and other such cognate questions have agitated and continue to agitate the minds not only of scholars, but also of the more thoughtful members of the community itself. In comparatively recent times, several publications as to the origin of the community and its root on Indian soil by writers acquainted with the Jewish religion and history, have appeared and afford much food for thought. By comparision, notable diversions are a feature of not a few, and a newer critical approach would perhaps throw further light on a subject of considerable historical interest (1).

(1) *Note*:— As the various histories and phamphlets hitherto published on the subject give the datum of the advent of the Beni-Israel into India as 2000 years ago, 1600 years ago and so on, later Jewish history, that is after the destruction of the "First Temple" at Jerusalem, as is germane to the theme herein, is presented only where relevant.

PART I

CHAPTER TWO

TRADITION AMONG THE BENI-ISRAEL RELATIVE TO THEIR ORIGIN

There is a tradition among the "Beni-Israel" handed down from father to son through the centuries of their sojourn in India, that their ancestors who came from a country to the north, (in the vernacular Marathi — "Uttarekadil Pradeshantun" literally "out of the provinces to the north") were shipwrecked on the Konkan Coast some two thousand or more years ago, seven pairs, viz., seven men and seven women only being saved. These were cast on the shores of the Konkan sea-board at Navgaon, a small village to the north of Alibag, the present head-quarters' town of the Kolaba (1) Collectorate. The bodies of many who were drowned were also washed on to this shore and were buried — men and women separately, in two large graves at the site and which exist to this day. In times of old, five smaller tumuli also existed near the site in which it is stated, some bodies which were washed ashore later on, were interred as found. Except for faint traces in respect of two of them, these are not now prominent. In the Jewish cemetery at Navgaon and close to the shore, which is fringed with a grove of Casurina Cocoanut palms and other trees, may be seen the two mounds or graves mentioned. There are some 600 more other graves, all Beni-Israel, scattered about in the vicinity of the mounds. That the mounds have

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(1) *Note:*— Kolaba is derived from the Arabic Kalabeh — a neck or strip running into the sea and was the name originally borne by the present town of Ali-Bag. Bombay Gazetteer Vol. XI p.l.

from time immemorial, been held in much veneration, is borne out by visits to the site by Beni-Israel from far and near. No graves whatsoever have been super-imposed on the ground covered by the mounds which otherwise might have occurred, if the tradition was forgotten or considered by later generations as having no foundation in fact, thus affording mute testimony to the tenacity with which it is held by the community in general.

On the assumptive inference having regard to the period mentioned in the tradition, the castaways were probably some of the dispersed elements of ancient Israel, who either voluntarily left or were driven away from their native soil during one of the many political up-heavals mentioned in Biblical history ascribable to that period.

From Palestine, the scene probably of their flight, to Navgaon by sea, is a far cry. Yet the hazard of the undertaking appears to have been set at naught. The voyageurs included both men and women and perhaps also children. They must indeed have been in a desperate state animated by a desire to escape from a threatened calamity to themselves and those whom they held dear.

This part of the Konkan coast has always been the scene of storms and shipwrecks, especially during the periods of the south-west monsooons. The locality of the tragedy which befell the ancestors of the Beni-Israel is in the vicinity of the Khandery (Kennery) and Undheri (Hennery islands) about six miles to the south of Bombay. As recently as the 17th July 1947, in the mid-monsoon season, the "S. S. Ramdas", a ferry coastal vessel of 900 tons, foundered in a storm, five miles south-east of its objective, the port of Revas, having left Bombay in weather considered

as fair for a favourable voyage. More than 700 passengers lost their lives in the disaster (1).

It will perhaps be of interest here to note a legend in regard to the Chitpavan or Konkanastha Brahamins which is closely analogous to the traditional tale of the shipwreck of the Beni-Israel ancestors. According to the Sayadhari Khand (a regional diary of important events amongst the Hindus), Parsaram (an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu) was so defiled by the slaughter of the Kshatriyas, that Brahamins refused to perform any religious ceremonies for him. At that time the bodies of fourteen shipwrecked foreigners happened to be cast ashore by the sea, which then washed the foot of the Sayadhari Hills. These corpses Parsaram purified by burning them on a funeral pyre or chit (chita, in Marathi) restored them to life, taught them Brahamin rites and made them perform ceremonies to free him from blood-guiltiness. As the Deccan (the table-land beyond the Sayadharis to the East) was already given to other Brahamins. Parsaram requested the sea to give a new domain to his proteges. The sea accordingly receded from the foot of the Sayadharis 30 miles and formed the Konkan which was then given by Parsaram to the Chitpawans(2). Thus the Chitpawans, unlike the bulk of the Brahamins resident in the Konkan, did not enter the country by the landward side. Their fair complexion, the extent to

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(1) *Note:*— At the present day the Kennery and Hennery Islands are considered as within the port limits of Bombay Harbour. The Kennery light-house is a guide to vessels entering the port from the south. It was first opened in 1867 and later improved in 1902.

During the 46 years ending 1872, 50 wrecks occurred in the vicinity, of which 11 were off Alibag and 9 off Kennery—Bombay City and Island Gazetteer, pp. 52, 63 & 64

(2) Bombay Gazetteer — Vol. XVIII, page 1.

which they use the Konkani Marathi dialect in their homes, and the legend of their survival as shipwrecked castaways, go to show that their entry into this part of the country may perhaps have been from some country beyond the seas; that they are foreigners however is open to question. In the history of the Konkan(1) it is stated that the hill of Parsaram overlooking the very fertile valley in which Chiplun, the main township where the Chitpawans are congregated, is situated, is said to be the spot from which the Avatar Parsaram created the Konkan for his Brahamin proteges, that although the legend affects the names of places in the district round about Chiplun, Parsaram was never in this part of the country. Further the Sayadhari Khand, the book in which the legend is recorded, is not more than 300 years old. Thus the analogy that two shipwrecks on different parts of the Konkan coast represent the same set of people who were foreigners and not natives of the country, is untenable. The fact that they appear to be the same has been much discussed among the Beni-Israel doubtless from information the sources of which are obscure (2) (3).

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(1) Kyd Nairne — The Konkan.

(2) *Note:*— A similar legend is related in regard to the formation of Malabar by the Prophet Parose Roman, i.e. Parsaram, who came from Gocarna and sought refuge from shame on account of the misdeeds of his mother and who induced the fishermen of the neighbourhood to colonise it and converted them to Brahamins. See Letter No. 1 of Jacobus Canter Visscher, a Dutch Chaplain, who lived in Cochin (1717-1723) and published in Menon's history of Kerala (Vol. I). The legend finds support in the fact that the indigenous word used by the people of Malabar to denote the country is "Malayalam" the compound of Mala-hill and Ala-wave.

(3) *Note:*— See Kehimkar, History of the Beni-Israel pp. 14 & 15.

A noticeable fact about the Beni-Israel is the absence of any reference to them as a community, or even as individuals, in any work, both religious and secular, of the Hindus in whose midst they have lived for more than two thousand years, or in that of the Dutch, Portuguese and the Mahomedans who exercised sovereignty wholly, or in part, over the Konkan coastal tracts in the era 1300 A. D. to about 1648 A. D. in which latter year the Marathas under Shivaji extended their conquests which included the territories comprised in this part of the country. Any records kept by them during this period are also lacking. They do not appear to have maintained any. Considerable literature and other data relative to the period from the beginning of the 19th century, especially since the establishment of the British power in Bombay and the extension of their sway over the whole country, has appeared, contributions in the vernacular emanating from members of the community to a considerable extent. The District Gazetteers compiled under the aegis of the Bombay Government and edited by Mr. James Campbell (afterwards Sir James Campbell) a member of the Indian Civil Service and a distinguished educationist, and first published in 1880, contain accounts of the Beni-Israel settled in Thana, Kolaba and the Poona Districts of the Bombay Presidency (Maharashtra State). An account of the community is also embodied in the Bombay City Gazetteer, the editor of which was Mr. S. M. Edwardes, also a member of the Indian Civil Service and an author of note. Interesting side-lights on the community are a marked feature of these self-contained narratives; they however lack the substance indicative of an historical approach to the subject matter, especially in regard to that of the origin of the community, no two accounts of which wholly agree as will be seen from the critique that later appears.

PART I

CHAPTER THREE

THE KONKAN COAST.

The western sea-board of Peninsular India from Dhanu (20° 30'N -74°.50'E) in the north, to Cape Camorin in the south, washed by the Arabian sea, is divided into two distinct entities known as the Kokan(1) Coast and the Malabar Coast. The extent of the Konkan littoral extends southwards as far as Mangalore (12°.55'N-74°.52'E) and Malabar from thence to the Cape at the southern-most extremity of the Peninsula. The Konkan land-mass from the coast on the west is bounded on the east by the Sayadhari range of hills the limits thereof being on an average 30 to 60 miles in depth. The Bombay-Konkan, commonly called the Konkanpatti, extends from a little north of Bombay (19°.0'N -72°.15'E) to the southern limit of the Bombay Presidency at Bhatkal to the south of Honavar in the North Kanara District ex-

(1) Note:— The designation Konkan for the strip of territory below the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea from the estuary of the Vitarna River, north of Salsette, to the estuary of the Savitri River in the South, is derived from the Sanskrit "Kankana" meaning a bracelet.

This part of the coastal strip is studded with numerous islands, big and small, many being found in the midst of the creeks which abound on this shore and which run for many miles inland. Salsette, Bombay (orignally seven islands) Trombay, Karanjia, Gharapuri (Elephanta) Butchers' island, the Undheri and Khaneri islands (now known as Hennery and Kennery islands) "Kalabe" or Colaba — Promonotary off Alibag and Janjira, are all islands within easy distance of the coast washed by the Arabian Sea. All are fringed with cocoanut palms and in the morning sunlight surrounded as they are by foaming rollers on their beaches, look like gleaming jewels encircling protruding wrists jutting out of the sea and hence the ancient name given as bracelets.

R. D. Banerji — Pre-historic Ancient and Hindu India, p. 5. (Blackie & Sons (India) Ltd).

cluding the Portuguese territory of Goa but including Sawantwadi, a small native state now merged in the Bombay State. The country north of Bombay is variously known as the North Konkan, Salsette and Vasai (Bassein) in some parts of the Thana District. The early Beni-Israel as they increased in numbers, spread out in the centuries after they set foot on Indian soil, to the East towards Pen, and Roha — Ashtami to the south-east, the migrations to the south being as far as the Savitri River. They settled also in some parts of the Hubshi's territories usually known as the Janjira State, or Habsan(1), an enclave originally the centre of activity of mercenary Abyssinians in the employ of the Nizam Shahi dynasty of Ahmednagar who maintained a fleet of ships and employed two Abyssinian admirals as from the time that Malik Ambar, the famous Abyssinian, was Prime Minister, about A.D. 1489. Arabs, Turks and Persians were the other Muslims who were in the employ of the Ahmednagar Kings serving both in the sea and land forces. These are now merged in the one community known as the Konkani Musalmans, being descendants of the Muslim foreign elements who intermarried with the natives and settled in the Hubshi's Jagir (Principality) of Janjira. On the conquest of the Ahmednagar kingdom by the Mogul rulers of Delhi, the Abyssinians continued their role at Janjira as admirals, under the aegis of the Moguls, a sanad(2) being conferred by the new overlords confirming the revenues of the Jagir, or territories comprised in the Principality, of which the Nawab of Janjira is the present Head.

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(1) Note:— Hubshi is derived from the Arabic "El-Habisn" which means people of North East Africa. The Hubshies were also called Siddis a corrupt form of Syed — a term of respect originally.

(2) A Sanad is a State document conferring specific rights to subjects resident therein.

As will appear later, the Beni-Israel expansion to the north was in the period after the British occupied the country. The communities at Panvel, Thana, Poona, Bombay and Ahmedabad were later accretions, mostly as a consequence of the entry in large numbers of the Beni-Israel in the Bombay sepoy regiments. The migration to Sind now in Pakistan, took place when it was merged in the Bombay Presidency for administrative purposes in 1847 A.D.

The western sea-board of India with its lengthy coast line and its proximity to the countries of the west, viz. Arabia and Africa and to the north-west, viz. Persia and Iraq, has many commodious harbours throughout its length, where, from time immemorial, inter-sea commerce has flourished. The Arabs, Egyptians, Israelites with their allies the Phoenicians, the Portuguese, Dutch French and the English exploited the trade with India by sea. The numerous creeks, with deep water near the shore and river estuaries, have afforded comparatively safe anchorages in ancient days to the large ships bringing cargoes of merchandise from overseas countries. The Indians were also no whit behind in building large ships of their own and conveying the products of India for sale and exchange in the markets of Arabia and the ports on the Persian Gulf and from thence to the interior to Babylon known as Baveru, in the pre-Christian era — Local trade also flourished from one coastal port to the other. The Konkan is mentioned in the geography of Ptolemy as the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea(1), and the works of various other travellers including the famous Strabo, 3rd century A.D., as Aparanta and Konkana— it is found in the Mahabarata and also in the Mahavansha,

(1) *Note*:— The Erythraean Sea is the ancient Greek name for the Persian Gulf.

Kamasutra and Brahatsamhita(1). The Chinese traveller Huyen Tsang, (7th century A.D.) mentions Konkanpura. Under Asoka (269-232 B.C.) the Buddhist Emperor of India, Aparantaka, identified as the Konkan, was an administrative unit under a Viceroy whose seat was at Suvarnagiri, the site of which has not yet been clearly identified. Of the fourteen known famous rock edicts of Asoka two copies were published on the western coast. A fragment of the 8th edict(2) has been found at Sopara on the west coast in the Bassein Taluka of the Thana District which under the name of Surparaka(3) (Ophir) was a famous port and the Capital of the Konkan from about 1500 B.C. to 1300 A.D.(4)

Much notoriety attaches to the Konkan and Malabar coastal regions as the stronghold of pirates in the days of old, who plundered the ships of all nationalities not even excluding the British, who traded with the ports, small and large, scattered on these shores. The elevated coast which afforded a clear vision for miles, the numerous shallow creeks leading inland, and sea breezes which prevailed alternately, and which compelled the mariners of old to hug the coasts, made sailing ships an easy prey to the bold sea-robbers who haunted the seaboard washed by the Arabian sea. Piracy was eliminated by the strong hand of the British in the early part of the nineteenth century and the pirates' nests destroyed.

(1) *Note:*— There are various records kept by pundits (mostly Brahamin priests) of important contemporary events amongst the Hindus during the past ages — especially in the religious sphere.

(2) Note:— The 9th edict of Asoka in Pali and Brahmi script was found at Sopara in January 1956 by Dr. H. G. Moghe vide Times of India dated 4th January 1956.

(3) Surparaka is derived from the Sanskrit Sur-god-paraka-ocean or god of the ocean.

(4) Bombay Gazetteer — Thana, Vol. XIV P. 314.

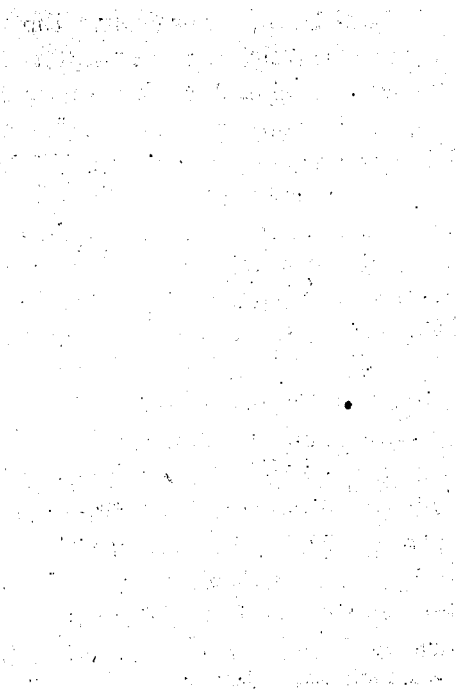
Piracy in these waters has not raised its head since and country craft specially, is safe. The Arab "bagalas" which even in these days ply their trade on the coast as from the era of the Mohamedan conquest, are as numerous as ever.

The language proper of the Konkan it is averred, is Konkani. In form it is Indo-Aryan, a product of the blend of the Magadhan Prakrit with the Dravidian, which prevailed during the Mauryan dynastic period (B.C 326 to 225). Konkani is allied closely with Marathi and Gujrathi and possesses many characteristics of the former. Many Beni-Israel speak Konkani which is the prevalent language, specially in Habsan, among the Konkani Mussalmans who write it in Urdu or Persian script. The Dev-Nagri and Roman (in Goa); the Kannada (Canarese) script is also used to a large extent in the southern Konkan, and the Marathi in the north. The Beni-Israel speak, read and write Marathi generally as a result of the official language in the Kolaba Collectorate being Marathi, instruction in which is imparted in the schools established in the district. The spoken Konkani is used by them in a more or less pure form.

The climate of the Konkan is equable throughout the year. The rainfall is heavy averaging 100 to 150 inches, quite 90% being precipitated in the period of the south-west monsoon(1) from about the middle of June to the end of September. The staple food is rice which is extensively grown. The principal pulse, wal or birda (Dolichos lab-lab), is sown in the rice fields after harvesting the paddy (unhusked rice) and is a cold weather crop. Coconut and betelnut trees abound and the mango, a most delicious fruit, is common througout the

(1) *Note*:— Monsoon is derived from the Arabic 'Mausim' meaning wet weather.

Konkan regions. The natural scenery has much charm, groves of trees are to be found everywhere, especially in the vicinity of villages and towns. The population is sturdy and health, except for the scourge of malaria which makes its appearance soon after the first rains, and in October. Altogether a pleasant prospect compared with the rest of India.



PART I

CHAPTER FOUR

THE COCHIN JEWS

Besides the community of the Beni-Israel in the Bombay Konkan, a Jewish Colony exists on the Malabar coast at Cochin, 9°.43'N and 76°.13'E. The Cochin Jews possess comparatively, a well authenticated history and in the religious practices of their faith, were, until quite recent times, much in advance of the Beni-Israel. The two communities however are quite distinct, the one, the Beni-Israel, speaking the vernacular Marathi and the Cochinis, the vernacular Malayalam. In fact the "White" Cochin Jews have been the mentors of the Beni-Israel in the correct observances of the Jewish religion for very many years. While the Beni-Israel were undiscovered and lived in isolation in their villages in the Konkan, the Cochinis maintained contact with those of their co-religionists living in other countries and were thus enabled to keep pace with the advance of Judaism outside their borders. The overseas commerce of Cochin and the trade agreements made by the Rajas with the Egyptians and other middle East nations, kept alive Jewish contacts, Jewish merchants and others of the Jewish faith paying visits to the Cochinis in whose religious welfare they evinced a keen sustained interest. Thus two communities of Israelites had founded homes on the western sea-board of India and lived side by side, as it were for many centuries, but the existence of the one was unknown to the other until quite recent times. A wide differentiation exists in the history of the Cochinis and that of the Beni-Israel and it is therefore of more than mere academic

interest in order that the one community may not be confused with the other, that a brief historical sketch of the Cochin Jews should be included.

Jewish history ascribes the advent of the Jews of Cochin to the shores of Malabar in the era of the persecution which took place in the Persian empire under Firuz (Pheroces, 457-484 A.D.)(1). Two Magi, members of the Persian priestly caste, were done to death by the Jews of Ispahan. As a reprisal, half the Jewish population of that city was massacred and Jewish children carried away to be brought up as fire-worshippers. The persecution which lasted ten years (474-484 A.D.) extended to Babylon and many prominent Jews suffered martyrdom as nothing short of their conversion to fire worship was demanded if they wished to save their lives. Many who were able, sought safety in flight and a large scale emigration followed towards Arabia and to India. That to India was led by a wealthy Babylonian, one Joseph Rabban, who accompanied by many families, sought refuge at Cranganore (18 miles north of Cochin) on the coast of Malabar, about the year 490 A. D. The emigrants were kindly received by the then Brahamin King, Arivi (Eravi) who not only granted them lands for settlement and permission to live according to their own laws, but conferred the rank of chieftain (Mardeliar) on Joseph Rabban with special hereditary privileges entitling him to princely honours, such as the right to ride on an elephant, preceded by a herald to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals

(1) (a) Graetz — History of the Jews. English translation by Bella Lowy (David Nutt 1891) Vol. II. Ch. XXII p. 637.

(b) Graetz — History of the Jews. English translation by Rabbi Rhine D. D. (Hebrew Pub. Co. N. Y. 1930) Vol. II, 4th ed. Ch. VIII, pp. 443-444.

and to sit on a carpet. The privileges conferred by Arivi were engraved on copper tablets which are in existence to this day(1). There were seventy-two Mardeliars who succeeded Joseph Rabban by direct descent. It appears however that the emigrants under Joseph Rabban were by no means the first who found a hospitable refuge on the Malabar coast, as a colony of Jews already existed, a settlement having been founded in 231 A.D. at about the same time as Jewish emigrants found a refuge in China viz. the remnant found at K'ai—Fung-Fu.

The origin of the settlement of 231 A.D. has not yet been satisfactorily accounted for. Tradition, it is averred, places it in the 6th century B.C. as an escape from the servitude of Cyrus, King of the Medes and Persians. In the 2nd century A.D. a Roman merchantship which plied regularly from Myos Hermes(2) on the Red Sea to Arabia, Ceylon and Malabar, is said to

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(1) A facsimile of the engraved text may be found in the Indian Antiquary Vol. III inter-leaved between pages 334-335.

Note : (a) The engraving is in old Tamil characters known as VATTELUTTU. There are two plates, the first is engraved on both sides; the second on one side only. The two plates are made up like a case with an unenyraved plate with two copper clasps.

(b) A literal translation of the privileges granted reads as under:

We have given to Joseph Rabban (the Principality) Anjuvannam, along with the 72 JANMI rights such as going with elephants and (other) conveyances, tribute from subordinate landholders and the possession (of revenue) of Anjuvannam; the light by day, the spreading cloth, the litter, the umbrella, the vaduce drum, the trumpet, the gateway with seats ornamental arches and similar awnings, and garlands and the rest.

See History of Kerala by Padmanabha Menon, Vol. II pp. 504 seq.

(c) *Note*:— Kerala embrances the territorial enclaves of Cochin and Travancore States and the whole of the Malabar District of the old Madras Presidency.

(2) *Note*—Myos Hermes is near Ras Abu Somer.

have planted the colony of Jews. Another tradition places the date in the 68th year of the Christian era when ten thousand Jews and Jewesses found their way to the Malabar coast on the destruction of the "Second Temple" at Jerusalem. These conflicting accounts and several others of a similar character, have not enabled a reasonable fixed chronology to be arrived at which would permit of research being directed towards a solution of the problem. The history of the Cochinis is thus necessarily confined to the era subsequent to the date of the copper plate tablet. Here again there are conflicting views of the actual date of the charter as no date is engraved thereon(1). The chronology is therefore taken, as from the year 490 A.D. from which datum a more or less correct account of the community is able to be derived. The view is also held that before Eravi granted the privileges to Joseph Rabban, some centuries must have elapsed since the foundation of the original Jewish settlement which prospered and attained considerable importance and influence. It was at the height of their prosperity that the rank of nobility was conferred on the leader with powers of plenary jurisdiction over the community.

In the era after the grant of the Charter by Eravi, the Jews at Cranganore attained a high degree of prosperity which continued for more than a thousand years. Cranganore known to the Greeks as Muziris and to the Jews as Shingali(2) was an important

(1) *Note*—Dr. A. C. Burnell assigns the date of the copper European nations to acquire a taste for the pungent spices of the East. Meat & vegetable preparations especially were plate to about the 8th century A.D. See page 35 Madras District Gazetteer. Malabar (1908) and Indian Antiquary Vol. III p. 334. The White Jews of Cochin have a tradition that the privileges were granted by Eravi in 489 A.D.

(2) *Note*—Recorded as SHINGALEH by Benjamin of Tudela.

entrepot for the trade with southern India, the Indian Archipelago and China; Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and Jews from the near and Middle East countries visiting the port for business purposes. From the 5th to the 15th century A.D. the Jews who were settled in the environs of Cranganore known as Anjuvanam, were virtually independent. The Chieftain, or Mardeliar, was empowered to levy his own taxes and was exempted by the Raja from paying into the Raja's treasury, several revenue impositions exacted from other subjects by virtue of the deed given to Joseph Rabban conferring princely honours. The privileges enjoyed by the higher castes were in the course of the ages thus automatically also acquired; the Jews came to be known as the ANJUVANNAR, a distinct privileged caste of noblemen, individuals being respectfully addressed by the courtesy title of "Maha Pillay"—"Maha Pillay" in short meaning "high personage".

Cranganore for many centuries enjoyed the status of an important port and a great emporium of international trade; situated at the mouth of the Periar River, 18 miles to the North of Cochin, it was known as Muchiri (Greek Muziris) or Kodungallur (Cranganore); the situation of the port afforded excellent facilities for trade with the interior of Southern India, the inland river systems converging into the mouth of the Periyar River on the sea coast. The Rajas were known as the Perumals; Bhaskara Ravi Varma, the last of the Perumals, ruled for 36 years. Muslims, Jews, Christians and Brahamins were treated on an equal footing each community being given certain exemptions from taxation and allowed the enjoyment of other privileges which were highly valued. It is recorded that the latter Perumal Rajas, if not the last, laid the foundation of the Jewish community as a guild with rights

and privileges similar to those possessed by the Nayars, the Brahamin nobility of Malabar(1). The Cranganore Rajas however are stated to have acknowledged the Raja of Cochin and the Zamorin of Calicut as their suzerains and were thus not exactly independent rulers(2).

The advent of the Portuguese on the Malabar coast in A.D. 1498 brought immense changes in the fortunes and commercial activities of the various local and foreign interests which traded in the spices, especially ginger and pepper, for which Malabar was famous(3) On his first appearance at Calicut in the year mentioned, Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese navigator who was the first European to essay the direct sea route to India via the Cape of Good Hope, was kindly received by the Hindu prince, the Zamorin, who permitted the Portuguese to trade. The Muslim monopoly, mostly of the Arabs and Egyptians, who carried the spices overland to Europe, was seriously affected and led to many conflicts between the Portuguese and the Moors known as Mapilas or Moplas, the progeny of Arabs and Egyptians who had intermarried with the women of the country and who formed a large proportion of the permanent inhabitants of the coastal trading centres(4).

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(1) Padmanabha Menon—History of Kerala, Vol. L. p. 308 seq.

(2) Ibid—Vol. II. p. 104.

(3) *Note*—It is stated that the Romans were the first among cooked by adding ginger, cinnamon, pepper etc. as boiling them only made them insipid. There was nothing else known to relieve the sameness of the food eaten daily. The spice trade to Europe thus acquired great importance in the Middle ages. By the time the spices reached their destination due to deterioration, theft, damage etc. they had become inordinately valuable—when sold they were weighed on apothecary's scales against silver or even gold.

(4) Padmanabha Menon—History of Kerala, Vol. II, p. 532 seq

The trade activities of the Jews at Cranganore extended from Calicut in the north-west to Quilon in the South-east. An infiltration of foreign Jewish elements from time to time strengthened the community. Many are said to have found an asylum from the persecutions in Europe in the middle ages. The growth of the community however was marked by separtist tendencies; two distinct classes came into existence; the first, the progeny of the original settlers by pure descent; the second those of mixed descent born of concubinage with women of the country who were called "black" Jews, but who were neither black like Nubians or Africans nor resembled certain of the very dark forest tribes of Southern India, but were of a deep "brown" colour. To the two classes was added a third or "white" who from their names, apparently hailed from European countries(1).

The "white" Jews gradually assumed a leadership over the whole community which those who claimed purity of descent and the black, resented. Equality of status was sought to be secured by the interference of a local chief, who however, as often happens, took advantage of the disunity and thoroughly destroyed the whole settlement. At about this time the Mardeliar leadership falling vacant due to a lineal descendant of Joseph Rabban not being available, two brothers of the noble family surnamed Azar,(2) both aspired to

(1) *Note*—Ii some of the Cochin archieves as for instance the census reports, the "white Jews" are designated as "Pardesis" or foreigners, the Brown" or "fair" as "Myuchasim" or of aristocratic lineage and the "Proselytes" or converts. so called "black" the descendants of female slaves converted to Judaism as "M'Shuhrarim".

At the present day the term "Malabar Jews" is generally applied to the "Brown" and "Black" combined—

(2) Joseph Azar was the last Mardeliar at Cranganore.

the position. The younger of the two with the assistance of numerous slaves of the family, massacred the "white" Jews who supported the elder brother. Both brothers as a result of the intervention of certain friendly chieftains, fled to Cochin from Cranganore. The remnant at Cranganore were successfully competing with the Moors (Mapilas) of Calicut in the spice trade. Greed and jealousy combined with the influence they exercised over the Zamorin, made the Mapilas to fall upon the Jews on the pretext that the spices offered by them were adulterated. The Moors laid waste the country-side. A great number of Jews were put to death; their houses were burnt and synagogues destroyed. The desolation at Cranganore is likened by the Jews to a miniature destruction of Jerusalem.

It may here be added that Cranganore port, even at the time of the first advent of the Portuguese at Calicut, was rapidly silting up; the geological instability of the coastal belt in the immediate environs of the port blocked up the estuary of the Periyar River, trading vessels being compelled to stand far out and cargoes conveyed to and from the shore in small boats. Deprived of its natural harbour, trade dwindled to negligible proportions, Calicut to the North and Cochin to the South becoming the main trade centres(1).

It is of interest to note in this connection that Cochin until 1341 A. D., was a petty port with little or no trade. In that year the narrow opening of the Cochin river into the sea, due probably to a seismic upheaval of the terrain, was so enlarged that Cochin was provided with a fine and safe harbour. The decline of Cranganore as a trade centre diverted the spice trade

(1) Padmanabha Menon—History of Kerala, Vol. I, P. 326 seq

to Cochin. The Portuguese finding that they made little headway at Calicut and Cranganore in obtaining adequate cargoes of spices due to the hostility of the Mapilas, entered into an alliance with the Raja of Cochin and secured a site for a new town to the west of the native city on the sea-shore. They established trade factories there, while churches. convents, schools and many imposing structures, sprang up round about. The enclave was strongly fortified, able when fully manned, to withstand a long seige. The Portuguese settlement was looked upon as the seat of the Viceroy and the Port soon became a flourishing trade centre rivaling Calicut. The Raja of Cochin, nominally a vassal of the Zamorin, thus incurred the serious displeasure of that potentate as Calicut as a trade centre, was seriously affected. Later several warlike measures were launched by the Zamorin against Cochin which however were easily repelled by the Raja with Portuguese assistance(1).

When the Portuguese first established themselves at Cochin, circa 1505 A. D. they found no Jews there. A small colony of "white" Jews however existed about a mile and a half away on the coast designated by the Portuguese "SENHORA SOUDE". The Jews colony called "Cannan-Nagore" or "Cannan Town" by them, is said to have been founded by the "white" Jews about Cranganore where cargo vessels were obliged to stand the year 1471 A. D.(2). Apparently the dwindling trade of out at sea, made the Jews to venture on the pioneer effort to divert their trade interests to Cochin the possibilities of which as a safe port, they were probably the first to recognise, especially as they were constantly

(1) Padmanabha Menon—History of Kerala, Vol. I. pp. 160 seq.

(2) Padmanabha Menon—History of Kerala, Vol. I. pp. 517 seq.

harassed and molested at Cranganore by the Moors backed up by the Zamorin, whose main interests were centred at Calicut.

The on-slaught of the Moors on the Jews at Cranganore in 1524 A. D. when the country-side was laid waste, led to Cranganore being finally abandoned by the remnant of the Jews who had continued to eke out a precarious existence. They ultimately sought a refuge at Cochin. The Raja generously allotted them a site for a new town near his own palace, circa 1565 A. D. The new settlement assumed final shape two years later in 1567 A. D. and is known as Mattancheri or Jews Town at the present day(1).

To eliminate their rivals in the spice trade with Europe where the gains were enormous, the Portuguese forcibly interfered with the local interests hostile to their dealings with traders from the interior. The weakness of the Raja of Cochin coupled with the enemity the Zomorin entertained against the Raja, enabled the Portuguese to do as they pleased and practically secure a monopoly and diversion of the spice trade to the Cochin Port(2). In spite of the protection afforded to them by the Raja, the Portuguese harassed and despoiled the Jews(3). The "Senhora Soude" colony apparently, was the main objective target as tradition even now extant amongst the older generation of the Jews, avers, that finding peaceful trade an impossibility, several of the younger members from the colony set sail in one or

(1) *Note*—Mattancheri is about a mile distant from Cochin proper. The Jews do not live in the native City.

(2) *Note*—The Portuguese are said to have crippled the trade of Calicut. See history of Kerala, Padmanabha Menon, Vol. II, pp. 173.

(3) Padmanabha Menon—History of Kerala, Vol. II, pp. 519.

two paravas, country craft of 16 to 25 tons each, to search for and found new homes at a trade port on the northern coastal belt. The South Malabar coast below Calicut being dominated by the Zamorin and his henchmen the Mapilas, a northern haven beyond Calicut was thus the only possible choice. The Portuguese however, were already establishing trade contacts all along this part of the western India littoral, Goa and Cheul (Revdanda) being maintained as important auxiliary ports after Cochin; new comers thus had little prospect of making a peaceful penetration, a Portuguese fleet of warships being employed to intercept vessels, local and foreign, who attempted to secure cargoes at the petty ports dotting the coast. The party who so boldly undertook the enterprise was not heard of again. They apparently disappeared into the void. Their fate has remained a mystery ever since.

Can it be that the 14 males whose corpses were thrown on the Konkan creek studded shore near to Chiplun (beyond Goa) and who are recorded as having been resurrected on the "Chit" or funeral pyre by the Avatar Parsaram, as set down in the Sayadhari Khand, were the survivors from the wreck of the "parava" or "paravas" referred to herein? A well nigh forgotten tradition and the physical features of the castaways cannot be said to be reasonably strong links to establish a connection on a firm historical basis.

The "Senhora Soude" Colony is recorded to have been ultimately abandoned by the "White Jews" after 50 years, that is about 1521 A.D. when they took shelter in Cochin. The Dutch captured Cochin from the Portuguese in the first week of the year 1663 A. D.; throughout the intervening period the Jews appear to have been subjected to harassment and despoilation at

the hands of the Portuguese. When the first attack by the Dutch on Portuguese Cochin was made in 1662 A. D. it proved abortive, the Dutch being compelled to withdraw their forces beseiging the Portuguese fort due to shortage of war material and the furious onslaught of the monsoon. The seige was raised in so clever a manner that the besieged Portuguese were unaware of the Dutch withdrawal until noon the next day. A Dutch soldier ran from point to point shouting words of command during the night, while a friendly Jew sounded the hour gong until early vespers. When the Portuguese discovered these stratagems they wreaked vengeance on the Jews who are said to have also supplied the Dutch with provisions. Mattancheri was sacked, many Jews were killed and an attempt made to burn the synagogue but the Pentateuch only was removed; it was recovered in 1668 A.D. A wanton act of vandalism was the removal and burning of the Jewish archieves kept in the synagogue amongst which was the Sepher Jacksar containing a detailed account of the Jews proceedings ever since they came to Malabar to that period(1). Contrary to the expectations of the Portuguese, the Dutch returned to the attack in force after the cessation of the rains. The Dutch trade establishments at Surat and other places on the coast, were subjected to heavy exactions by the Moguls and the war in Europe between Holland and Portugul enabled hostilities to be renewed as the Dutch considered Cochin a more suitable acquisition for purposes of their trade in view of its lesser distance from the main trade establishments of the Dutch East India Company in the Indian Archipelago. Eventually, after very hard fighting, the Portuguese at Cochin capitulated. The surrender was effected in the first week of the year 1663 A. D. The Dutch

(1) Dr. John Wilson—Lands of the Bible, Vol. II. p. 680.

when they became masters of Cochin, showed great favour to the Jews who however due to the depletion in their wealth and numbers, were unable to make headway towards that degree of prosperity that they previously enjoyed.

The Cochin Raja on the settlement of the Jews in Mattancheri, appointed a Chieftain or Mardeliar over them, apparently a revival of the privilege granted to Joseph Rabban and his successors by Bhaskara Ravi Varma. A rod of office with silver furnishings was given as an emblem of authority to the Mardeliar which enabled him to exercise certain limited powers over the community in civil and criminal matters, the Raja reserving to himself the right of trying great and capital causes. With the advent of the Dutch, the Governor conferred an official staff with its top mounted in gold bearing the motto of the Dutch East India Company, confirming the rights; this was in addition to the emblem of office given by the Raja(1). The Chieftainship however was not made hereditary; selected elders were appointed to the exalted position as a personal distinction(2).

The Dutch were in control of Cochin till the year 1795 A. D. when it was invested by the British on the rupture with Holland. Cochin capitulated to the British forces in October of that year. It was formally ceded to the British in 1814 A. D. Cochin as a centre of trade thereafter greatly declined(3). By 1810 A.D. the Mardeliars ceased to exercise their functions and English laws

(1) Padmanabha Menon—History of Kerala, Vol. I. pp. 190 Seq. and Vol. II pp. 525 seq.

(2) *Note*—Several such emblems are in the possession of the Cochin Jews at the present day.

(3) Padmanabha Menon—History of Kerala, Vol. I, pp. 175 seq.

came into force whereby all subjects of the Raja were put on an equal level(1).

It is of interest to note in this connection that the first synagogue the Kadavumbagam was erected in 1544 A. D. in the Mattancheri area before its completion and occupation by 1567 A. D., by Baruch Levi son of Joseph Levi, the first Mardeliar of Cochin. The Pardesi or White Jews synagogue was built in 1568 A. D. by Samuel Castiel, the 3rd Mardeliar; it adjoins the palace grounds of the Raja of Cochin, the Hindu Temple where the Rajas are crowned being in the vicinity. The synagogue was partially wrecked by the Portuguese in 1662 A. D. and was completely renovated two years later. It has a clock tower added in 1761 A.D.; the floor is tiled with the rare willow pattern blue tiles from Canton, China, era 1762 A. D. In the synagogue are kept a gold crown presented by the Cochin Raja, the copper plate tablets, a silver case for keeping the books of the Torah presented by the British resident, Col. Macaulay in 1806 A. D. as also two silver lamps given later on by the same gentleman. The 3rd synagogue in Cochin, the "Thekum Bagam" was built in 1647 A. D. by Jacob Castiel, the fifth Mardeliar of Cochin.

Both the Pardesi (white) and Malabar Jews founded homes side by side in the Mattancheri area. In 1662 A. D. when the Portuguese laid waste this residential area the Jews in general, mainly the Malabar elements thereof, fled for safety to Ernakulam, two miles to the east of Cochin, the Cochin backwaters which separated the two towns, crowded with boats engaged in trade, affording quick and easy passage to the refugees. These were hospitably treated by the inhabitants and a large number elected to make Ernakulam their permanent

(1) Ibid Vol. II, pp. 522.

home instead of returning to Cochin. This colony which now occupies a separate sector in the town, consists mostly of traders. Two synagogues exist bearing the same names viz. "Kadavumbagam" and "Thekum bagam" as in Cochin. It is said that these names originally were borne by the synagogues erected in Cranganore and which were destroyed.

Dr. John Wilson in his notes on the Cochin Jews(1) records that number of "White" and "Black" Jews was inconsiderable due to intestine feuds and immigation as a result of the attacks by the Portuguese after the abortive attack of the Dutch in 1662 A. D., the Jews synagogue, records and houses were burnt and they were robbed and killed. He adds that he was told by them that they (the Cochin Jews) first came in contact with the Beni-Israel at Rajpuri (on the Konkan coast). The year in which such contact was made is not, however, given. The Beni-Israel have a tradition that one David Rahabi, a Cochin Jew, was in their midst in the Konkan and brought about a religious revival, but the year or place is vaguely mentioned. A pertinent fact in the history of the Beni-Israel is the sustained interest taken by the "White" Cochin Jews in their religious advancement for well nigh the greater part of the nineteenth century which has resulted in the Beni-Israel taking their rightful place amongst "World Jewry" as far as the correct tenets of their faith are concerned. High praise is due to these pious Jewish intellectuals who without hope of any reward in the face of many trials and difficulties, gave of their time and knowledge voluntarily for the religious welfare of their brethren in faith. A fuller notice relative to the matters last herein mentioned, appears in due sequence.

(1) Dr. John Wilson—Lands of the Bible, Vol. II. pp. 680-82.

PART I

CHAPTER FIVE

THE COCHIN JEWS & THE PESHWAS OF THE DECCAN MARATHA KINGDOM

The mystery surrounding the origin of the Chitpawan Brahamins referred to briefly in the previous Chapters, has received considerable attention from both Indian and European Scholars in the past. An interesting contribution is that recorded by Mr. S. M. Edwardes, I.C.S., an author of considerable note. In his work "By-ways of Bombay (1912), he writes as under:

> "That some historic truth lies below the garbled tale of shipwreck and resurrection is partly proved by the physical traits of the descendants of these castaways, of those men in fact, whose immediate ancestors, employed at first as messengers or spies of Maratha Chieftains, by innate cleverness, tact and faculty of management, gradually welded together the loose Maratha confederacy and became directors of the internal and external policies of the Peshwas' dominions".

Mr. Edwardes adds that :-

> "To this day the true Chitpawan possesses the fair skin the strange grey eyes, the aspect of refined strength and intelligence, which must have characterised the shipwrecked mariners of old fable and marked them out in later years as strangers in a strange land and who after long sojourn in the country of their adoption moved upwards to the Deccan and stood within the shadow of the Peshwa's throne."

Further that :-

> "Forty years ago Rao Sahib V. N. Mandalik(1) himself a Chitpawan, remarked that the ancestors of the tribe probably came by ships from "*some other part in India*" or from the opposite coast of Africa".

Unlike the Beni-Israel, the fourteen castaways, from whom the Chitpawans are said to have been descended were all males. The fair skin and strange grey eyes even now frequently met with(2), connote an ancestry allied more or less to the "bionde" rather than the "brunnette" racial group. As the Sayadhari Khand in which the legend of the Chitpawan Brahmins is recorded, is said to be not more than 300 years old, as from the date of the publication of the Bombay Gazeteers viz. 1880 A. D., the era much prior to the datum 1580 A. D. would not be far out as the starting point for an enquiry as to the "blonde" peoples if any, resident or visitant, known historically to have been in the near vicinity of the locality covered by the legend, having special regard to the suggestive inference that the record, when compiled, referred to events of significance amongst the Hindus that had or were known to have occurred, antecedent and not too far out in point of time, to the actual compilation of the record itself and which presumably although known, had not already found mention in existing quasi religious works.

(1) *Note*—Rao Sahib Mandalik was at one time, 1877, vice-president of the Royal Asiatic Society, Bombay Branch and has many learned publications to his credit.

(2) *Note*—(i) Vincent smith in the Oxford History of India p. 430 remarks—"The Brahamins of Maharashtra, especially the Chitpawan section of the Konkan, are an extremely intelligent class to which the Peshwas belonged".

(ii) At the present day many Chitpawan occupy high positions under Government in the Bombay State, as also in business offices.

Chiplun, the main townlet in which the Chitpawan Brahmins are congregated and where their ancient cultural and religious institutions are still to be found, is situated at the inland end of the Dabhol creek about 30 miles from Dabhol port on the Konkan coast washed by the Arabian Sea, midway between Janjira and Ratnagiri on the same coastal belt. History records that on the advent of the Portuguese in Western India waters, Dhabol port was systematically destroyed as from 1508 A.D. onward by the Portuguese, their main trade interests being centered first at Cochin (circa 1500 A. D.), Cheul 1508 A. D. and Goa 1510 A.D. The Adil Shahi Dynasty of Bijapur held sway over both Dabhol (Muslim name Mustafabad) and Goa for the outlet of the Deccan overseas trade, Goa being also the principal centre for the annual pilgrimage to the Haj (Mecca). Muslim trade having thus been eliminated from Dabhol by the Portuguese the few foreign commercial elements at the Bijapur Sultanate such as Turks and Persians and whose complexions may be described as of a white olive hue outwardly resembling the European, were compelled to traverse their business activities to some other port, most probably Cheul, the nearest entrepot-centre) for the trade overseas and which was in the dominions of another Muslim potentate, the Sultan of Ahmednagar. That the foreign Muslim elements round about Chiplun in the era after 1508 A.D. even if they existed, were or may have been the principals in the drama of the "Chita" near about Chiplun may be definitely discounted. They could not but have been in a very good position to easily make their way and find asylum amongst their own kind in the interior, the Portuguese activities being confined to the coastal belt. The main entry of the Deccan commerce to and from the Dabhol port was the inland creek terminating at Chiplun. Muslim foreign nationals would have been easily recog-

nised by the local inhabitants, Hindus as well as the Indian Muslims round about. Further, Muslim habits of life, social and religious and their cultural up bringing, were factors that cannot be ignored in assessing the possibilities of assimilation into the Hindu fold at a period when Muslim sovereignty over the country was widely established. The differences were too great for any such conception to be reasonably entertained.

That the swarthy skinned Syrian Christians evangelists who were resident in Southern India were possibly concerned in the particular shipwreck on the shore line of the Dhabol creek near abouts Chiplun may also be discounted. They were very few in number and their activities were confined to the interior of Cochin-Travancore. They were not traders and that they at any time, contemplated the penetration of Muslim held enclaves can confidently be ruled out.

In the early 16th century of the Christian era the nearest prominent "Whites" on the western coastal belt to the north and south of Dabhol were the European Portuguese and the "White" Jews of Cochin. The Jews were the first comers, initially at Cranganore and later at Cochin, both ports on the Malabar coast. The Portuguese although they first set foot at Calicut on the same coast, were forced to resort to Cochin due to the hostilities of the Moors or Mapilas of Calicut who forcibly resisted their trading activities. The Jews were the first to discover and use Cochin as a port. It was free from the interference of the Mapilas while affording ample facilities for loading and unloading cargo within the harbour anchorage. When the Portuguese first set foot at Cochin they found a small colony of the "white" Jews settled about one and a half miles from the town of Cochin. This colony the Portuguese designated

"Senhora Soude"(1). The Colony named by the Jews Cannan-Nagore or "Cannan town" came into existence about 1471 A.D. being founded by a section of the Cranganore Jews as Cranganore port at about the period was losing its commercial importance due to the silting of the harbour entrance which entailed cargo ships standing far out at sea, trade goods being transported to and from the shore in small boats. As trade rivals of the Portuguese who were late comers to Cochin, the Jews were systematically harassed and despoiled by the Portuguese. They were finally compelled as a result, to abandon "Senhora Soude" after 50 years, about 1521 A.D. The period 1498 to 1560 A.D. is stated to be the infancy of the Portuguese power in India. The then policy adopted by them was the occupation of the major ports, by-pass the minor ports of any importance, those likely to prove rivals being systematically destroyed, e.g. Dabhol 1508 A.D., Nagothna & Bassein 1509 A.D. and so on. By 1560 A.D. the Portuguese are said to have been complete masters of the Konkan coast, with a predominant control of Cochin on the Malabar coast; their trade rivals on that coast being the Mapilas at Calicut and Cannanore ports. The activities of the Portuguese north of Bassein were directed against the Sultan of Gujerat, Bassein belonged to Gujerat. The Sultan was assisted by the Turks and Arabs. The Portuguese trade bases at Cheul, Goa and Cochin were protected by naval units which patrolled the coast line effectively. The Portuguese superiority at sea with their large ships and artillery pieces, acted as a distinct check for any hostili-

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(1) *Note*—The Senhora Sandi colony was called "Cannanagore" by the Jews or Cannan-Town (Nagore or Nagar means town). See Times of India of 22.8.1854.

ties inspired by the local trade interests adversely affected, to be attempted against them(1).

In view of the outstanding fact that the Portuguese were formidable at sea and that their objective was the build-up of their trade interests at the major ports, and that Dhabol was systematically destroyed from 1508 A.D. onwards, Portuguese nationals cannot be said to have been stationed at or in the vicinity of the port for any appreciable length of time. The trade of the port being at a standstill the navigable creek leading to Chiplun remained practically unused by small country craft which courted destruction if found anywhere near the port. That the Chitpawan castaways were likely to be Portuguese nationals who met with disaster when pursuing country craft may also be definitely discounted not only for the foregoing reasons, but the fact that as devout Christians their social code was antagonistic to that of the Hindus from the highest to the lowest caste. That even in the helpless position in which they found themselves the castaways would have made themselves amenable to Hindu customs and usage leading to their ultimate absorption in the Brahamin fold, is a proposition patently untenable having regard to their Christian upbringing. As members of a shrewd and adventurous European race they would without doubt have attempted to get in touch with their compatriots. Sea faring was their profession and if local facilities were lacking, they were quite capable of devising some practicable scheme to enable them to rejoin their own kind. The local inhabitants, beyond doing what they could to assist them in their help-less condition, cannot be said to have been anxious to entertain

(1) Kyd Nairne—The Konkan, pp. 38 seq.

unwilling guests. The observations foregoing cumulatively, are unfavourable to the conception that the fourteen castaways were of European Portuguese extraction.

Reverting to the legend(1) itself a matter of fact version thereof would be as under:

Fourteen male bodies of a white race, apparently foreigners were found lying about on the shore line of the Dabhol creek near abouts Chiplun; preparatory to their cremation, the bodies were placed in position on a chit or chita (funeral pyre). As the supposedly lifeless bodies, however, showed signs of animation, such steps as were possible, were adopted by those present, the local inhabitants, to re-susicate them. All fourteen revived. This resurrection was doubtless considered as a miracle by the simple folk who witnessed it, as a sign that the strangers were under the special favour of the gods. The revived castaways thus came to be looked upon virtually as superior beings and were so treated from the very outset of their sojourn amongst the Hindus. The most favoured of the gods were the Brahamins. Doubtless the customs and behaviour of the strangers impressed those with whom they came in direct contact as on a plane with those of the highest caste in the land. Hospitality to them thus came to be gradually extended by those who were their near equals. This practical recognition led eventually to their admission and ultimate assimilation into the Brahamin fold.

That the vessel which brought the strangers to the Chiplun shore was small is fairly evident. The creek can only be navigated by local craft with a shallow draft. The number of the castaways was also small.

(1) *Note*—See chapter I.

The degree of exhaustion having regard to their subsequent revival, proves that after the disaster they met with, the strangers could not have been long in the water. They perhaps attempted to effect a landing on the nearby shore. The vessel by the force of the impact with the muddy bottom, overturned and broke up, precipitating the occupants in the waters of the creek. That the cloak of sanctity with which the legend is infused, bears no relation to fact, is also fairly evident. The sage Parsaram as elsewhere recorded, was never in that part of the Konkan regions in which Chiplun is situated. The avatar Parsaram also known as Parsu Rama is supposed by many authorities to be a legendary figure. The miraculous powers attributed to him as an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, are credited to have given him semi-divine powers which enabled him to reclaim land from the sea for the settlement of his proteges. The epic age B. C. 1400 to 1000 B. C. is said to be the era of his varied activities. The development of the formative principles of caste as now existing amongst the Hindus, is also attributed to this era (1).

Further the land mass of the Konkan as now geographically depicted, existed even in the period B.C. 273-232 when the great Asoka, the Buddhist emperor of India, ruled in India. The Konkan regions as far south as Mangalore were included in the Suvarnagiri satrapy of his dominions. The Chitpawans if they then existed as a distinct Brahaminical sect, find no mention in Hindu lore ascribable to the era, nor in any known works historical, religious or semi-religious, in later times. As a separate distinct Brahaminical entity their

(1) Padmanabha Menon—History of Kerala, Vol. I, pp. 26 seq.

emergence and recognition in the Brahamin hierarchy, may reasonably be attributed to the period not far short in point of time to the datum of the compilation of the Sayadhari Khand. The stress laid on the word "chit" in the cognomen "Chitpawan" confirms the story of their resurrection and marks them out as a later sectional accretion relatively of not the same antiquity as the ancient Brahaminical stock. The Chitpawans are also called Konkanastha Brahamins as distinct from the Deshast and other Brahamins of Maharashtra and which bespeaks their origin as well as their ancestral home as from the Konkan regions.

The concept that the "white" Jews from the "Senhora Soude" colony near Cochin, were most probably, if not definitely, the foreign castaways on the Dabhol—Chiplun creek, gains more prominence with the elimination of the other "white" elements before mentioned. In their quest for the greatest possible commercial gains the Portuguese policy was to cripple established interests mostly Muslim, who were their rivals in the European trade. The Muslims conveyed merchandise via Suez on the Red Sea, overland to Alexandria, from where the Venitians were the main distributing Agents to the European countries bordering the Mediterranean sea. The Portuguese aimed at securing the whole of this trade by conveying it direct by the sea route via the Cape of Good Hope to Europe. At Cochin at the very outset, they found the white Jews firmly established. The Raja by whose favour they gained a footing in Cochin was also friendly with the Jews. To show overt hostility to the Jews would have placed the Portuguese in an unfavourable position with the Raja. The Jews however were few in number and familiar with the vernacular Malayalam. Compared with the Moors of Calicut and Cannanore they were

indeed very small fry. The fact that they were later found helpless to withstand the systematic harassment of the Portuguese and to abandon the "Senhora Soude" colony and find refuge at the instance of the Raja, in the environs of Cochin itself, speaks volumes as to the very harsh nature of the persecution they were subjected to at the hands of the Portuguese and the loss of trade that was brought about. It will be recalled that the Portuguese to secure the sole monopoly in the spice trade crippled the commerce of Calicut handled by the Mapilas, more formidable rivals of the Portuguese than the handful of Jews at Senhora Soude.

In view of the foregoing a greater measure of credence can safely be accorded to the traditional tale still extant amongst the Jews of Cochin, to the effect that a party of the younger colonists at Senora Soude set out to explore the commercial possibilities of and establish a new Jewish settlement on the coastal belt northwards, the southern being dominated by the Zamorin and his henchmen, the Mapilas. The date of this event can safely be set down as five to ten years prior to the final evacuation of Senhora Soude about 1521 A. D. i.e. 1515 A. D. or thereabouts. This datum is well within the ambit of the period before adumbrated that the "chita" resurrection probably occured in the era much prior to the actual compilation of the Sayadhari Khand, viz. 1580 A. D. The Parava or Paravas in which the Jewish voyageurs set out were eminently suited for the task undertaken. The vessels were small, of shallow draft and were inconspicuous and could lie well hidden in small creeks which dotted the coast and where the Portuguese with their large ships, could not follow, small craft in the earlier years of the Portuguese penetration being unable to be maintained for lack of European personnel, Indian Portuguese

Christians not having yet emerged as the result of the policy brought into being later of permitting Portuguese seamen and soldiery to marry with the women of the country after baptism. The discovery that the Portuguese had already penetrated the northern coastal belt and had destroyed Dabhol and other petty ports and were establishing Portuguese pockets of commerce further north and eliminating established trading interests, was doubtless a severe set-back to the Jewish quest for founding a new colony. Apprehension of their safety and their return to far away Cochin was a distinct hazard. The parava or paravas were headed inland from Dabhol towards Chiplun to escape capture by the Portuguese, a possibility not to be lightly ignored in view of the havoc at Dabhol and similar ruins elsewhere along the coastline traversed, land-marks of Portuguese destructive activities in the wake of their policy for securing the sole monopoly of the India spice trade. The fact that the fourteen castaways on Chiplun's shores were all males fairly clearly establishes if not definitely, the reasonable belief that the parava or paravas met with disaster in the Dabhol—Chiplun Creek—the apparently lifeless bodies of the occupants being later found cast high on the banks of the creek at ebb tide. It may be added that having regard to the connotation hereinbefore, the Chitpawans within the space of 50 to 60 years had established themselves so firmly within the Konkan Brahamin hierarchy, as to seek by their influence, an unassailable position within the compass of the Hindu Shastras as of divine or at least semi-divine origin so that their position in the Brahamin fold would be accepted without question. The compilation of the Sayadhari Khand doubtless offered a suitable medium for the dissimilation of the legend associated with their resurrection.

One of the most notable and humane traits of the Hindu character all over the country, is the tolerance shown towards peoples of other faiths, especially those in distress. Caste restrictions forbid the admission into their homes of people other than of their own kind. They will on the other hand, get together and find shelter and provide necessities for all sorts of people who seek their help. An empty hut or two, straw for bedding and cumblies (rough blankets), cooking pots generally of burnt clay, fuel and food stuffs being readily forthcoming. The fourteen castaways doubtless from the very outset, were well provided for; lacking means of communication, their sorry plight in the midst of strangers who spoke a different vernacular, viz. Marathi, were barriers unfavourable in coming to a quick decision as to their future course. Their upbringing as a distinct caste,—Anjuvanar in Cranganore for centuries,—their familiarity with Hindu customs and manners, their cultural and religious background in the midst of an Hindu environment of a pattern not far removed from that of the Nairs of Malabar, were assets favourable to their gradual recognition as of a superior caste status far removed from the great majority of the people in whose midst they found themselves. Jewish hygenic laws enjoin the greatest cleanliness of person. All prepared food likewise must conform to the dietary laws. Kasher meat for instance only can be partaken and lacking the wherewithal to slaughter goats or sheep or even fowls, if they were available, meat was probably adjured by the castaways. As traders, trading establishments were more suited to their attainments than other avocations; their intelligence and shrewdness doubtless made for this avenue of activity being gradually thrown open to them. As they settled down, they are more likely to have found

gainful employment under Brahamin traders and land-holders; they were of an intelligent race and were more amenable in their daily habits to the Brahamin way of life, than otherwise. It may reasonably be inferred that the castaways deferred any decision as to their return to their own kind until such time as they found themselves in a position to act independently on their own. As subsequent events proved they remained where they were and were absorbed in the Brahamin fold. Their lot probably was cast in pleasant places or that they found they could not possibly venture to go back to Cochin unless at great hazard, the Portuguese being dominant on the sea-board.

The observations as before set forth are warranted by the fact that in ancient days, Hindus in general followed the custom of employing poor men of their own caste in their households and other establishments, without wages for an agreed number of years, generally seven, as in the case of the Jewish patriarch Jacob (Gen. xxix-20) and receive after the expiry of the set period, one of the daughters of the household in marriage. The father of the young woman bears the expenses of the marriage ceremony. If his son-in-law so desires he can go and live elsewhere with his wife; in such a case the father-in-law presents the newly weds with a cow, a pair of bullocks, two copper vessels, one for holding water and another for cooking, and sufficient rice to last them for a year (1). This ancient custom of the Hindus was apparently the instrument by which the Chitpawan castaways were absorbed into the Brahamin hierarchy; within two generations they appear to have secured a dominant influence to come

(1) Abbe Dubois—Hindu Manners & Customs, p. 213.

to be classed and recognised as a separate Brahaminical sect in the country-side especially in the Konkan and the Deccan. It may be added that Chiplun at the period of the Chita incident most probably had amongst its inhabitants few Brahamins, mostly poor priests attached to the temples and such others, not a large number, who were petty traders and landholders who eked out a precarious living the revenue and other tax exactions of the Muslims who ruled the country, being extremely onerous. It is amongst this poor Brahamin aristocracy that the resurrected castaways doubtless gained a gradual footing of equality which culminated in marriage alliances. The progeny of these alliances after two or three generations being classed as of Brahamin origin.

That the "white" Jews of Cochin are definitely not of mixed stock is determinable by the fact recorded that

> "Their complexion is not exactly European but it is of the pale olive freshness most nearly allied to it. The delicate carnation of the tips of the fingers proves that no native blood flows in their veins."(1)

This description innately establishes their origin as distinct from the orient peoples; the names borne by some families are derived from the Spanish and Egyptian. This merely connotes that they entered those countries due to the persecution of the Jews in the near East kingdoms, their original home. Their presence on the shores of Malabar may be attributed to trade contacts and emigration due to the intense persecution they were subjected to by the Christian peoples of the Mediterranean basin in the middle ages.

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(1) Padmanabha Menon—History of Kerala, Vol. II, p. 529.

An impressive fact to which some prominence may be attached, is the name by which the palace of the Peshwas in the heart of Poona City was called viz. SHANWAR WADA or Saturday Palace. The Wada, an imposing structure mostly of wood, was built in 1730 A. D. by the Peshwa Baji Rao I, who succeeded his father, the first Peshwa, Balaji Vishwanath in 1720 A. D. As is well known, the Jewish Sabbath is observed on the Saturday of each week as a day of rest from all work and for religious observances for the spiritual benefit of the individual. The desecration of the Sabbath is considered by the Jews as an unpardonable sin to be avoided at all costs.

The Hindus on the other hand consider the day unlucky. Sani, or the planet Saturn rules over the destinies of mankind on the Saturday according to Hindu belief; its baleful influence spells disaster to all undertakings. It may here be recalled that the Egyptian Pharaoh "Melol" consented to Saturday being set apart as day of rest for the Israelites in bondage as the Law-giver Moses pleaded that work done on that day would be unfruitful due to the ascendency of evil over good, as Egyptian astrologers credited the influence of the planet. Saturn as malicious and harmful (1). Could it be that the Peshwas were of a contrary belief and considered Saturday as a day of good fortune and rejoicing, a belief that can only be attributed as a legacy inherited from their Jewish ancestors?

It may be added that the Shanwar Wada palace was burnt in a fire first in 1812 and again in 1829 A.D. The site it occupied is converted into a garden and

(1) Angelo Rappaport—Myths and Legends of Ancient Israel, Vol. II, Chap. XVIII, p. 236.

name boards here and there indicate the position of the Darbar Hall, Zenana quarters and so on. The Peshwas Daftar was burnt in the two conflagrations. These archieves perhaps contained many an intimate sidelight on the habits of life followed by the Peshwas, an inheritance probably conforming in some respects to several Jewish practices and now long consigned to oblivion.

PART I

CHAPTER SIX

CRITIQUE OF THE VIEWS EXTANT AS TO THE ORIGIN OF THE BENI-ISRAEL

Except for the traditional assertion by the Beni-Israel that their ancestors came from a country to the north and were ship-wrecked more than 2000 years ago on the coastal belt of the Bombay Konkan in the vicinity of the Navgaon village now included in the Alibag Taluka of the Kolaba Collectorate, no tangible evidence has been forth-coming as to the actual country of origin. To Christian missionary zeal may be attributed the first attempts at elucidating the problem as, "to the antiquarian and the Jewish missionary alike a field of exceedingly lively interest is opened out by the Beni-Israel of the Bombay Konkan; while many landmarks were available to shape enquiries as to the presence of this portion of GODS ANCIENT PEOPLE ON THE SHORES OF THE KONKAN in the absence of clear history, the conclusions at the last would often fall short of what is certain (1).

It was the late Dr. John Wilson, D. D., an eminent divine and a great Christian missionary and educationist of the Free Church of Scotland (the Wilson College and the Wilson High School in Bombay are named after him), who took a keen interest in the education of Beni-Israel children, who first essayed a solution of the problem "OF THIS CURIOUS AND INTERESTING PEOPLE OF WHOM SO LITTLE IS KNOWN IN

(1) Rev. John Wilson (Scottish Mission) and Rev. Henry Lord (St. John's Mission). Pamphlets re: Beni-Israel (without date).

EUROPE". Dr. Wilson in the original account read as a historical paper at the anniversary meeting of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society 1838-39, and reproduced in the "Lands of the Bible" (1) came to the conclusion that the "BENI-ISRAEL" ARE INDEED ISRAELITES A REMNANT OF THE POSTERITY OF THE TRIBES WHICH WERE REMOVED FROM THEIR HOMES BY THE ASSYRIAN KINGS". In his tractate entitled "The Beni-Israel of Bombay, an appeal for their *Christian Education*", printed in 1852 (Edin), Dr Wilson resigned the view that the Beni-Israel were a remnant of the "Lost Ten Tribes" and advanced the concept that the community was an off-shoot of the large and long established fraternity of Jews resident in Arabia Felix (South-west Arabia) known as the Yemeni Jews, "THE MOST CONTIGUOUS TO INDIA, AND MAINTAINING INTER-COURSE WITH INDIA TO THE PRESENT DAY, OUR BENI-ISRAEL WHO SO MUCH RESEMBLE THEM, HAVE MOST LIKELY BEEN DERIVED. IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE THAT, WITH SOME OF THEIR WOMEN, THEIR FORE-FATHERS LEFT YEMEN DURING ITS OCCUPATION AND SUBJECTION, AND THE RETALIATION AGAINST IT BY THE ETHOPIAN KINGS IN THE SIXTH CENTURY OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA; about which time also we are now inclined to think the Cochin Jews came to India"..... Further in Dr. Wilson's opinion, the physiognomy of the Beni-Israel "seems to indicate a union in case of both Abrahamic and Arabian blood"—the tradition that the forefathers of the Beni-Israel came from the "north" being interpreted to mean "from Arabia or the Persian Gulf"(1)

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(1) Dr. John Wilson—Lands of the Bible, Vol. II, pp. 667-676.

Jewish history ascribes the infiltration of the Jews into Arabia to two main waves of immigrants; the first, according to tradition, after the destruction of Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem in 586 B.C., and the second, the parallel event in respect of the 2nd Temple in 70 A.D. Northern Arabia, Arabia Petra, was the venue favoured in the first case; the possibility also existed of small pocket colonies having been established in the Yemen by Israelite mariners who made the voyages to India in the era of the Jewish kings as Jewish centres of trade existed at Sanna (the capital) and Hariba. The formidable Jewish warriors known as the "Zealots" were the first to penetrate the western coastal strip now known as the Hejaz, during the second wave. Their number was augumented from time to time by such as sought an asylum amongst them from the persecution of the Romans in Palestine. The Zealots founded communities on the tribal model of the Arabs and were nomads and agriculturists. Their territorial acquisitions enabled inaccessible mountain fortresses to be founded for security and which afforded an asylum to those who fled to them for protection from time to time (1). Two of the Jewish tribal entities that came into existence claimed priestly descent and were known as the Kohanim. The intellectual superiority of the Jews amongst whom reading and writing were common acquisitions raised them in the estimation of the Arabs who lacked similar accomplishments except for a very few. Semitic descent and language affinities and customs—the Arabs practising circumcision even as pagans-enabled a very close association to be forged as far as mate-

(1) Note:— It is stated that on the destruction of the Jewish homeland the refugees who sought an asylum in Arabia smarting under defeat, were formidable both as warriors and bigots. See "Record of the British Expedition to Abyssinia" by Holland & Hozier p. 1.

rial interests were concerned. Intermarriage, it is said, made for an assimilation of the character of the two peoples. Greater friendliness was brought about when the Arabs were informed that they were the kinsmen of the Jews through Yoktan (Jokshan) the son of Abraham by Keturah (Gen. xxx) and Ishmael the son of Hagar.

The penetration into the Yemen to the south-west simultaneously with that of the Zealots in the north was on a much smaller scale. The Jews had no tribal formations but were petty traders scattered amongst the Arab population.

In 500 A.D. (1) the Toban or prince of Yemen, Abu Kariba, invaded and conquered the territory to the north of his principality over parts of which the Byzantine Empire exercised a loose hegemony. He appointed his son as Governor at Yathrib (Medina). The people later, revolted and killed the Governor and Abu Kariba in retaliation laid seige to the city cutting off the main food supply by destroying the date palms in the vicinity. Fearing a massacre, Arab and Jew combined and offered a stout defence and the seige dragged on. Abu Kariba having fallen seriously ill, two learned Jewish intermediaries interceded on behalf of the inhabitants and sought a truce. Abu Kariba probably deeply touched by the advocacy of the peacemakers, raised the seige, the inhabitants being mercifully dealt with. The Toban's nephew Harith Abu Amru was appointed Governor or both Yathrib and Mecca.

(1) Note:— The Jewish population in the whole of the Yemen circa 500 A.D. is computed at 3000 only. See page 640 of the Encls. of Jewish Knowledge.

Abu Kariba on his return to the capital (Sanna) invited the two men of learning to expound the Jewish faith in which he was keenly interested. The simple creed and the lofty ideals of human conduct it propagated, apparently made so deep an impression on the prince that he embraced Judaism. Many of his subjects including his nephew the governor of Yathrib and Mecca, followed suit. The emergence of the new Jewish kingdom became known far and wide through the media of the many foreign merchants who visited the country on business.

On the death of Abu Kariba (520 A.D.) his son or grandson, Zurah Du Nivas, who succeeded him, took to Judaism seriously. He assumed the name of Yufef (Joseph). Those of his subjects who refused to become proselytes, he cast into a glowing pit of fire whereby he was called by the oppobrious name of the "Lord of the pit" (1). On being told that the Jewish subjects in the Byzantine empire were being harshly treated, he had certain Christian merchants travelling through his dominions to Himyars seized and harshly treated to force the Byzantine emperor to deal justly with the Jews. This outrage led to a rebellion among his Christian subjects at Najran. The severe measures that were adopted in suppressing the rebellion alarmed the Byzantine Emperor Justin I. As he was then engaged in a war with Persia, he appealed to his co-religionist Elezbaa, the Negus (prince) of Ethiopia, to go to the assistance of the Christians in the Hemyratic province. Elezbaa collected a large fleet which was supplemented by a force sent from Egypt by Justinian the co-regent

(1) Sale:— English translation of the Koran — Preliminary discourse.

of Justin I. The Yemen was invaded by the Ethiopians and the country laid waste. On realising that all was lost Zurah-Du-Nivas scaled a lofty eminence on horse back and threw himself with his steed into the sea at the foot (530 A.D.). The victorious Ethoepians consolidated their position in the conquered territory and founded a Ethoepian colony establishing trade contacts with Egypt, Persia and Ceylon (2). This Ethoepian conquest has given birth to the concept adumbrated by Dr. Wilson that the Beni-Israel ancestors were refugees from the Yemen, as in his opinion, it was not impossible for such refugees with their families to make their way to India's shores.

The more important considerations to determine the historical value of Dr. Wilson's assertion are briefly

(a) the social and religious practices of the Beni-Israel as compared with those of the Yemen Jews.

(b) The ways and means that existed or could have been available at the time of the Ethiopian invasion for refugees to make their way to India.

In regard to (a) the formula of prayer composed of two Hebrew sentences of six words each, knows as the "Shema" is the first acquisition of all Israelites including proselytes. From childhood to old age, this formula is repeated twice daily, morning and evening in the home and again on the Sabbath during prayer in the synagogues and during festivals. During their youthful years Jewish children learn the daily and sabbath prayers, the dietary laws and other usages and the Yemen were well equipped to scrupulously follow

(2) Graetz:— Popular history of the Jews. Translation by Rhine Vol. II. Transition period Chap. X. pp. 488.

the practices of their faith, inherited by them from their Palestine ancestors. They maintained contacts with the Jewish religious academies which came into existence in Egypt and Palestine after the destruction of the Second Temple and thus were enabled to keep pace with the advances in religious knowledge. The Beni-Israel of the Konkan on the other hand knew only the "Kiryat Shema" or the first of the two Hebrew sentences of six words of the Shema and which they repeated on all religious occasions such as the observance of the sabbath, festivals, birth, circumcision and death (1). This fact alone goes to prove that they were inhabitants of Palestine during the existence of the first (Solomon's) Temple at Jerusalem, at which period the Levite priests only were familiar with the Hebrew liturgy, the congregants assembled in the Temple precincts intoning the "Kiryat Shema" at the beginning and conclusion of the religious services. Further, the Yemen Jews as a result probably of intermarriage with the pagan Arabs, were wont to follow and still follow certain superstitious rites especially at birth and death. When a child is born a live goat is slaughtered under the couch of the mother, and the flesh with wet dates is distributed to relatives and friends. On the seventh night after the birth, seven black lines are drawn on each door of the house in which the birth occurred and three raw eggs are broken and thrown away, in the belief that the devil would not molest the mother and the new-born babe. As soon as a male dies, the body after bathing is wrapped in a winding sheet and is first carried to the nearest house of prayer and after due solemnities, it is taken direct from the home to the cemetery. These and several other customs of a like nature are not found among the Beni-Israel ancient and modern, to even a very small extent. It is abundantly evident from the

(1) Kehimkar — History of the Beni-Israel of the Bombay Presidency. p 40.

foregoing that within the frame-work of religion alone the glaring differences are unfavourable to the concept that the Beni-Israel are derived from Yemani Jewish stock.

With reference to (B) having regard to the near presence of the Ethiopian fleet a possible safe outlet by sea to India's shores 1500 miles away by sea, was non-existent. The Arabs were not a united nation at the period, concerted Arab mercantile activities came into being on the adoption by them of the Muslim faith. The Arab conquest of Persia and Egypt brought home to them the immense gains that accrued by following commercial pursuits. In the era precedent, Indian traders in Indian vessels visited the Arab principalities that were existent on the East and West coast of the Arabian Peninsula where they bartered the products of India for those of Arabia. Arab baglas (sailing vessels) cruised only in Arab coastal waters, close in-shore, and did not venture on the open seas. History records that the earliest Arab expedition sent to India's shores from Ooman, circa 636-37 A.D., under the auspices of the Khalifs, Uthman-ath-Thakafi, the 2nd Khalifa Omar, landed at Thana in Salsette. It developed into a mere raid and returned. The Arabs inexperienced in the navigation of the open seas, so described its hazards, that the Khalifa was constrained to discourage such expeditions (1). It may be added that the conquest of Sind by the Arabs in 712 A.D. made little or no impression on the Indian coastal trade with the Yemen, Arab traders visiting India's coastal ports occasionally (2). The first Muslim Arab merchants settled on the

(2) Vincent Smith — Oxford history of India p. 11.

(1) Edwardes — Historical Monograph — Bombay Island — Census of India 1901 Vol. X. Part IV. pp. 22-23.

Malabar coast during the regime of the Khalifa Walid 710 A.D. (3) The Yemen became a flourishing trade centre with India in the centuries after the conquests of Sultan Mahomed of Ghazni circa 1020 A.D. by which period the Yemenite kingdom had attained independence under its own Imam (4). The main ports of India that the Arabs traded with were Cambay on the Khatiawar Peninsula (Saurashtra), Sofala (Sopara-Ophir) at the estuary of the Vaitarna River, north of Salsette Island, 30 miles from Bombay, and Simur (Cheul-Revdanda). The coast of the Hadramuth was a vast desolate waste with but one oasis difficult of access. That refugees from the Yemen could possibly have ventured with their families to traverse the region infested by fierce nomad robber Arab tribes who eked out a precarious living, to make their way to Arabia's eastern shores and from thence take ship to India, is on the face of it, a far fetched prospect. The hazards were too great. The vast desert regions to the east of the Yemen hinterland, where Bedouin robber hands roamed, were equally uninviting for refugees to safely penetrate the eastern coast. The Arabs in the north in the Hejaz harassed the Jews and tried to dislodge them from their strongholds as they bitterly resented the Jewish hegemony that had existed and which they perhaps feared would possibly again be revived. The only safe course for the Jewish refugees if any, to adopt was to found tribal formations on the model of the Arabs. They would thus have been able to defend themselves, their families and their effects, and eke out a living as petty traders if not as robbers. It is reasonable to

(3) Padmanabha Menon — History of Kerala, Vol. II. p. 548.
(4) Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol. V. (1903).

infer that tribal formations were more practicable as a measure of safety as the Yemen after the withdrawal of the Ethiopians, a decade or so later, witnessed a rapid resettlement of the dispersed Jewish elements, where their descendants still have their homes.

As regards Indian ships being available for the refugees here again its reasonable possibility may be ruled out. The risks were too great. As neutrals, the Indians must have remained at a distance; their rendezvous was the island of Socotra (1) in the Gulf of Aden; their ships if they ventured any where near the scene of conflict would have been confiscated, and their crews dealt with harshly if not killed. Finally the authentic history of the Cochin Jews before briefly set forth, determines the nature of the statement that the Cochin Jews also are derived from the Yemen Jewish stock, as one wholly in the realm of conjecture and not factual history. It is perhaps as well to remark that similarity in appearance and bodily structure are not infallible criteria for determining descent from any particular racial stock. As a matter of common knowledge the Jews as a distinct racial entity, present a marked resemblance to each other the world over. In this connection the Rev. Henry Lord of the St. John's Mission in Bombay, who lived amongst the Beni-Israel for many years, makes the following interesting observations:—

> "The Beni-Israel present a marked physiognomy of their own and that a distinctly Jewish one. In addition to what has come under his own observation during ten years among them, the writer may

(1) Note:— The name Socotra is probably derived from the "Sanskrit" "Sukhatara" meaning the fortunate. The island was the main resort of Indian seamen and merchants from time immemorial.

mention among the testimonies of those who have given him their experience on this head, that of Mr. Sinclair, C.S., Collector of Thana, who once told him that during twenty years of contact with the Beni-Israel he could only remember the case of one of them whom he had difficulty in identifying as a member of this community from his countenance; we have already remarked that they (the Beni-Israel) are among the fairest of the people they dwell amongst" (1) (2).

In the modern age the Falashas of Abyssinia who claim Jewish descent but whose origin is obscure, emerge as a possible emigrant body of refugees who fled to Abyssinia and founded homes there in the vast empty spaces of the country consequent on the invasion of Caleb Elizbaum of the Jewish kingdom in Arabia Felix. Physically, the Falashas-literal meaning strangers-resemble the Abyssinians and have black wooly hair; the pigmentation of the skin is somewhat lighter. Can it be that the Falashas are descendants of the Jewish elements who composed the Jewish Hemaritic kingdom and who sought safety on the African mainland opposite? It is said that besides Abyssinia, small pocket colonies of the Falashas are also existent in Eritrea, Italian Somaliland, and the Blue Nile regions of southern Soudan. It is obvious from the foregoing that whatever the datum of the immigration of the Falashas on to the mainland of the African continent washed by the Red Sea in the near vicinity of both Arabia Felix and the Hejez, that a quicker and safer

(1) Rev. Henry Lord. Pamphlet Beni-Israel of the Bombay Presidency 1879.

(2) Mr. Sinclair was a member of the Civil Service and a keen antiquarian and contributed regularly to the Indian Antiquary.

passage for refugees was ready at hand at the very doors of the Jewish inhabitants of S.W. Arabia who had founded homes after the destruction of the 2nd Temple at Jerusalem, and that far India was the objective of any, is more in the realm of fantasy than historical fact.

In the final analysis the inevitable conclusion that emerges from the study herein, can only be that as an authoritative historical contribution as to the origin of the Beni-Israel, the concept that they are an off-shoot of the Jews settled in the Yemen is wholly unacceptable and safely to be discarded as such.

"Mutatis Mutandis" the enunciation foregoing apart from other details, also holds goods in respect of the assertion recorded that

> the ancestors of the Beni-Israel *may have come* from the Persian Gulf and *may have* been a detachment from the large Jewish community of Babylon where they were in great trouble early in the sixth century due to the revolt of Rabbi Meyer and the consequent wrath of the Persian monarch (1).

The Babylonian Talmud had been completed by the end of the fifth century A.D. and religion and religious observances amongst the Babylonian Jews were in conformity more or less with the practices in vogue amongst Eastern Jewry of which not a vestige was found amongst the Beni-Israel ancients.

Both Arabia Felix and the Persian Gulf are recorded in the historical sections of the Bombay Gazetteers

(1) Bombay Gazetteer, Vol. XVIII. Poona.

as the countries of origin of the Beni-Israel and in the absence of facts to the contrary, have during the last 75 years, gained the imprint of history being extensively quoted in the census and other such official reports of government. Their excision is overdue from the point of view of factual history as distinct from the glaringly conjectural.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE BENI-ISRAEL CONTACT WITH THE YEMENI JEWS AT ADEN IN THE MODERN AGE.

The incidental history of the Beni-Israel shows that they maintained a more or less sustained contact with the Yemeni Jews at Aden for more than half a century in modern times. With the cession of Aden and the hinterland adjoining by the Sultan of Lahej in 1837 A.D. to the British, and the transfer of this British out-post (known as the Gibraltar of the East) as an appanage of the Bombay Presidency in 1839 A.D. for administrative purposes, two Indian regiments, besides wholly British units, were posted there in which a large number of Beni-Israel officers and men, served. The Indian troops were relieved from time to time by drafts sent from India in which also many Beni-Israel were included. This continuous flow was augmented to a large extent by other service personnel such as military accounts' clerks and draftsmen, sub-engineers, overseers and mistries of the Public Works Department, Commissariat and medical services employees and skilled artizans, such as masons and carpenters, who were recruited in Bombay on high wages. A fairly large number in the categories mentioned herein were Beni-Israel as caste restrictions precluded Indians from crossing the "Kala Pani" or the ocean highway, as caste fellows for religious ceremonials such as death, would not be available in a foreign land. Later, Beni-Israel families were also permitted to join their husbands and sons, especially of those employed in the Public Works Department. The building of fortifications, roads, barracks, hospitals, officer's bungalows harbour works and warehouses at Steamer Point, and the

repairs and reconditioning of the old reservoirs discovered, were all governmental activities spread over a number of years. The number of Beni-Israel in Aden was thus quite large. The census of 1872 A.D. records the garrison at Aden as 3433 officers and men and the civilian population in the British Sector at 19,289. Of the latter 1435 were classified as Jews all residents of India, the greater number being Beni-Israel and the smaller, the Bagdadi element from Bombay who were encouraged by the authorities to carry on trade in Indian made goods especially textiles, for which there was a considerable demand. Of the total of 1435, 666 were males and 769 females.

In the beginning, the Beni-Israel associated with the Yemeni element in the hinterland to a considerable extent. They attended the sabbath and festival services in the Yemeni Jews' synagogues. They were however not called to the reading of the Law (Torah) as the majority of the Beni-Israel had to be prompted in intoning the opening and closing Beracoth which they were unable to read in Hebrew and which they read from prepared Marathi scripts. With the advent of Beni-Israel families and the restrictions that were imposed by the military authorities for civilians to go out of and come into the British sector during daylight hours only, the Beni-Israel founded their own "Prayer Halls", acquired scrolls of the Law and employed paid Yemeni "Hazamim" or readers, to conduct religious services. As a result, many Beni-Israel acquired the Yemeni Hebrew diction and imitated the genuflexions that were indulged in by the Yemini readers in the belief, erroneous that they were enjoined by the teachings of the Talmud (1). The haunting Yemini tunes of many a

(1) Note:— Such genuflections have now disappeared among the Beni-Israel.

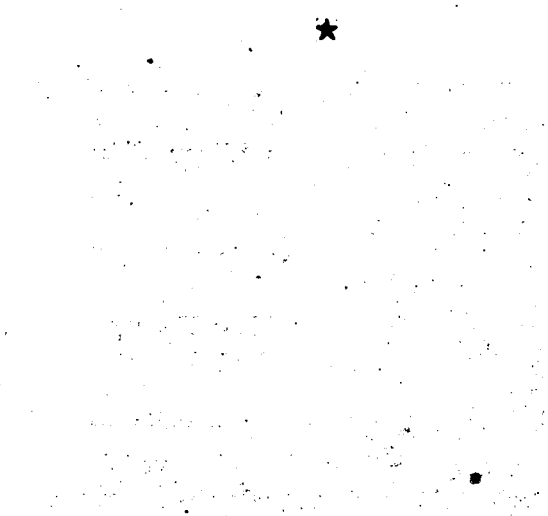
Hebrew song and hymn sung during the Sabbath and festival prayers were special favourites with the Beni-Israel who, on their return to India, introduced them in their homes and in the services in Beni-Israel synagogues. One Samuel Isaaji (Pinglay) (afterwards Khan Bahadur) an accounts officer of the Public Works Department, at Aden, where his father Isaaji Joseph (Pinglay) was a works overseer in the employ of a rich Arab contractor, one Aba Hassan, on his return to Bombay, built a prayer Hall near his bungalow in Sankli Street, Byculla, where the personally conducted the festival and sabbath services, having acquired a thorough knowledge of Hebrew at Aden. Mr. Isaaji had maintained a prayer hall at Aden during his tenure of office there and brought several scrolls of the Law (1) when he came back to Bombay. Mr. Samuel Issaji was wont to invite and hospitably entertain the Yemini elements resident or visitant to Bombay during sabbaths and Jewish holidays. As many Beni-Israel outside his own family circle were also invitees on such occasions, much loose thinking was not lacking at the period to link the two communities together as of the one Yemeni stock.

Close association with the Konkani Mussalman (2) elements from the Habsan (Janjira) who followed the Beni-Israel to Bombay on the advent of the British and where they lived side by side and followed more or less the same avocations as mechanics in the rail-

(1) Note:— Some of these scrolls were later donated to the Beni-Israel synagogues in Bombay, Poona & Panwell.

(2) Note:— The progeny of Arabs & Persians who married with native women and are called the Konkani Musalmans. They live mostly in the Habsan or Janjira principality where a large number of Beni-Israel were also resident in the 17th, 18th & 19th centuries.

ways and naval workshops and other industries such as textile mills, brought in its train fashions in dress and head gear on the Muslim pattern, also affected to some extent by the Yemini Jews, especially the Tarkish Fex. The cumulative effect of the impact in the social and religious spheres as herein led many to hold the superficial view that the Beni-Israel were derived from Yemeni stock and that their ancestors therefore must have been refugees from Yemen, the most contiguous country to India. These erroneous views have thus found expression in various forms in official gazetteers, religious pamphlets and so on and merit no consideration whatever.



PART I

CHAPTER EIGHT

ORIGIN AS RESOLVED BY KEHIMKAR.

The problem of origin as resolved by Kehimkar in his "History of the Beni-Israel of the Bombay Presidency" is in substance similar to the account given by him in the pamphlet, "A sketch of the history of the Beni-Israel and an appeal for their education" written as President of the Israelite School Committee published fifty to sixty years before the history referred to(1). He emphasises the fact that the ancient Beni-Israel observed the "sabbath" strictly and were known and are even now known as "Shanwar Telis" or "Saturday oilmen" in the Konkanpati (Konkan tracts) as they strictly abstained from their occupation of oil pressing on Saturdays. Owing to the shipwreck of their progenitors and having lost all their belongings, they had forgotten all the prayers required to be said at the time of religious rites and ceremonies and only knew the formula of prayer known in Hebrew as the "Kiryat Shema" which translated means "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one God" and which they repeated on every occasion such as circumcision, marriage, funeral obsequies etc. Of the festivals enjoined in the Pentateuch, they observed in variant form as compared with the present, only the Passover, New Year and Kippur or the Day of Atonement. They had forgotten the two festivals of Pentecost and Tabernacles, although in the case of the former, the "Feast of Ingathering" which is celebrated at the same time, was observed by them a fortnight before Tabernacles, through an error. The

(1) (a) Note:— No date is given in the pamphlet — 1892 A.D. is stated by the Rev. Henry Lord as the probable date.
(b) Note:— The history was published in 1937, 28 years after the death of the author.

feast of Lots or Purim which was an accretion to the regular festivals vide Esther, the eighth book of the Hagiographa, and introduced when the "Second Temple" existed at Jerusalem, was also observed by the Beni-Israel. Further, the mode followed by the Beni-Israel of old (and it may be said even in modern times), of requiting their vows, were in the case of six out of the nine mentioned in the Bible, in full conformity with the precepts laid down in the Levitical code. The three which were omitted were enjoined by "Holy Writ" to be performed within the precincts of the "Temple" itself and on the sacrificial altar and then too under the direct auspicies of the High Priest and thus incapable of being observed by the Beni-Israel in their adopted home in India. All these facts combined led the author to come to the conclusion that the ancestors of the Beni-Israel were resident in Palestine itself in the era of the existence of the "Second Temple" at Jerusalem and that they fled the country in the period of the hostile in-roads therein by foreign incursions and the cruel persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes, circa 175 B. C. The author avers that two sea routes were open to the refugees; one through the ancient ports of Elath and Eziongeber at the apex of the Elanitic (Akaba) Gulf and the other through Egypt via one of the ports on the Egyptian Red Sea littoral the objective being Chaul (Cheul) now known as Revdanda (1), an entrepot for the trade with Arabia and Egypt on the Konkan coast about 30 miles to the south of Bombay and about twenty-four miles south of Navgaon where the shipwreck in which the ancestors of the Beni-Israel were concerned, occurred. In regard to the tradition held by the Beni-Israel that their ancestors came from a country to the

(1) Note:— Revdanda — old name Chaul — is 30 miles S.E. of Bombay 180°-33' N. Lat. and 72°.59'E. Long.

north, the concept is adumbrated that although the two Confederacies of "Israel" in the north and "Judah" to the south, were non-existent at the time of the "Second Temple", many of those descended from the northern stock (Israel) were resident in Palestine having returned to the country on the restoration of the "Temple", from various regions where they had dispersed and had found a refuge, and that therefore the Beni-Israel ancestors claimed descent as from the peoples of the Northern Confederacy and not from Judah, thus explaining the tradition.

The "Second Temple" at Jerusalem was four years in building (519-516 B. C.) and the sacred edifice was consecrated three weeks before the feast of Passover in the latter year. It thus follows that when the Second Temple was in existence for a little more than 340 years the ancestors of the Beni-Israel left Palestine. Jewish history records that the era of the "Second Temple" was marked by a new social and religious order amongst the Jews as the result of the teachings of the great sages Ezra and Nehemiah. During the Babylonian exile after the destruction of the First Temple by Nebuchadnezzar, Ezra, a descendant of the Jewish High Priests, had infused a spirit of unwonted enthusisam for the Torah (the five books of Moses known as the Pentateuch), amongst the exiled Israelites and these found concrete expression on their return to Palestine under the leadership of the sage when permission was given by Artaxerxes for the re-entry of the Jews into Palestine and the re-building of the Temple. The work begun by Ezra was also carried on by Nehemiah who was appointed governor of Palestine by Artaxerxes. The reading of a portion of the Law (Sacred Scriptures) at the festival of Tabernacles which was at the period celebrated in the correct manner by the erection of the

"Succah" or booths and for which the community brought in branches of olive trees, myrtles and palms, began at this time and has since formed a regular feature of the Hebrew liturgy and which is continued to be observed in modern times. Ezra and Nehemiah founded the "Great Assembly" of the "Seventy Elders", the same number as assisted the law-giver Moses in the burden of administering the day to day lives of the people and who, having the power to make and enforce laws founded upon scriptural authority, brought about great changes. Above all the "Great Assembly" instituted regularly appointed readings from the Law on every sabbath and on every week day and on festivals. This period of Jewish history is known as the "Sopheric Epoch" in reference to which the late Rev. W. A. DeSola(1) makes the following comments:—

> "A regular formula of prayer for the Jewish people must be dated from the Babylonian captivity and the time of Ezra". With the assistance of the "Great Assembly" composed of the most learned and celebrated men of that age among whom were the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Daniel besides many others of scarcely less note, a series of prayers, to enable every Israelite to acquit himself of his duty in a proper manner, were composed and regular morning, afternoon and evening prayers in lieu of the regular daily sacrifices, which at these periods were offered in the Temple, and additional prayers for these solemn days on which the Law directs additional sacrifices to be brought, were instituted. During the whole period of the "Second Temple" these prayers were read in the synagogues

(1) Sola — Herbrew Prayer Book, preface 1st edition.

at Jerusalem and in other parts of the Holy Land, when sections of the Law and passages from the prophets were regularly read."

The history of the "Shema"(2) reveals the interesting fact that the addition of a sentence of six Hebrew words "The Baruch Shem" was engrafted on the "Kiryat Shema" as early as the days of the "Second Temple"—the idea of the "Sovereignty of God" being linked with the "Shema". It was the rabbis of the time who ordained that the sentence meaning "Hear O Israel, the Lord is Our God the Lord is one" should be immediately followed by the new sentence, "Baruch Shem etc." meaning "Blessed be His Name whose glorious kingdom is for ever and ever". Thus, as the Beni-Israel ancestors and their progenitors if they actually resided in Palestine at the period when the "Second Temple" existed, must have during the period of 340 years approximately, thoroughly imbibed the whole gamut of the new religious prayers, forms and ceremonies in vogue throughout the country; yet, conceding the fact that they lost everything in the shipwreck, their generations in India were only familiar with the "Kiryat Shema" and no more. At the very least surely, they would not have forgotten the additional sentence of six Hebrew words to the Kiryat Shema which from the time of the "Second Temple" was repeated twice daily (1) in the home alone, and during sabbaths and festivals in the synagogues and in the Temple. The series of prayers specially designed to enable the average Israelite to acquit himself of his religious duties in a regular manner were common features of the every day life of the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, yet the fact

(2) Hertz — Chief Rabbi — The Pentateuch, p.920 seq.
(1) Note:— The Shema at the present day is repeated 3 times viz. morning, evening and night prayers.

is recorded that the Beni-Israel ancestors were unaware of the two festivals of Pentecost and Tabernacles and even the reason why the festival of the Passover was instituted.

It is questionable whether an outlet from Palestine by sea to India existed at the period of the suggested flight of the Beni-Israel ancestors. The ancient ports of Elath and Eziongeber on the Elanitic (Akaba) Gulf, flourished at the time of King Solomon and the later kings of Judah and Israel and were sequestered and reverted to Aram (Syria) and later to Edom, in the reign of Ahaz (739-735 B. C.) vide II Kings xvi 6 (1). Even if they existed, and this is extremely doubtful, they must have remained in obscurity as there is no later mention of them either in Jewish history or in the contemporary history of the period. Similarly, facilities by sea from a port on the Red Sea littoral of Egypt for direct access to India is, in the absence of well authenticated facts, not capable of a possible reasonable inference being arrived at of an escape from Egypt. Alexandria was the seat of the Government of the Potlemies at the time and access from Palestine to Egypt was by sea via the port of Gaza. The division of Alexander's empire on his death, brought in its train many conflicts between Syria and Egypt under the rule of the Seleucidae and the Potlemies respectively; Palestine being sandwiched between the two, Judeans were compelled to take sides and as unanimity was absent amongst those in high places in Jerusalem concerned with the destiny of the people, intrigues were common and loyalities to Syria or Egypt shifted, self-interests of those who were influential being to the fore rather than the welfare of the community. The Indu-means, Philistines and Edomities were at the period inveterate enemies of the Jews on account of the severity with

(1) Note:— See Part II Chapter III.

which Jewish farmers of taxes exacted the revenues due. Access through the Negev desert to the south to Elath and Eziongeber if they existed, and through the desert to the west of Palestine to Egypt, thus did not offer a safe passage to refugees by caravan, as even if they managed to cross hostile inhabited territory the wandering Beduins and robber tribes who infested the desert in the unsettled times, were a serious menace to the safety of caravans; the risks were enhanced in the case of caravans burdened with women and perhaps children as in this case. The statement that safe outlets were available for the ancestors of the Beni-Israel from Palestine or Egypt is not borne out by history, neither of the two routes mentioned being in existence in the suggested period of the flight. Jewish history moreover, emphasises the fact that the Alexandrian Jews, wealthy and prosperous, who lived exclusively in two separate enclaves in the city proper and who maintained close contacts with their brethren in Palestine made all refugees who sought an asylum in Egypt during the persecution of Antioclius Ephiphanes, welcome in their midst affording them all facilities for their welfare. The Alexandrian community was at the time in hign favour with the ruling dynasty of the Potlemies and refugees from Palestine were enabled to infiltrate unhampered (1).

With regard to the assertion that Chaul (Chaul is now known as Revdanda), was the objective port in India of the fleeing Israelites, the ancient, Chemula, (Chaul) is mentioned as a port in the 4th century B. C. when it formed part of the Arabastrae Orotae kingdom which probably included a large part of the

(1) Graetz (Rhine) Popular history of the Jews. Vol. I. 396 seq.

Deccan (2) In B. C. 250, "Chemula" was included in the viceregal province of Suvarnagiri of Asoka's empire but is not named as a port, Surparika (Ophir) being mentioned as the chief port (3); Chaul finds mention as a port in the dynastic rule of the Silharas (southern branch) who held away over the Konkan regions for four and a half centuries 810 to 1260 A. D. (4). It is asserted that the fame of Chaul as a centre of trade from the earliest historical times to the end of the 16th century was intermittent and is attributed to the favourable conditions prevailing at certain periods, when it was incumbent, due to the many political upheavals in the Deccan and the interior of the country, for the normal trade routes to be bypassed and the traffic diverted to Chaul via the Sayadhari range from the Pa'R pass in the South to the Tal pass in the north and which centered at Chaul; trade goods also then flowed via the Bor Pass (Khandala—Khopoli Ghat) to Panvel and was carried thence in coastal sailing vessels down the Panwell river, navigable at high tides and thence to Chaul (1). That Chaul replaced Surparika (Sopara—Ophir) at any time is not evident; it was undoubtedly a minor port of considerable importance in ancient days enabling Indian merchants in the interior of the country to send the products of the Deccan and the contiguous provinces to the port when the unfavourable political conditions impelled the use of the safer alternative trade routes mentioned for the purposes of overseas trade.

(2) Gazetteer — Bombay City and Island, Vol. II (1896) p.4.

(3) Vincent Smith — Asoka the Buddhist Emperor of India — p. 103.

(4) Bombay Gazetteer — Vol. XII — II, pp. 420-21 Vol. XIV. pp. 372-73 & Gazetteer Bombay City and Island Vol. II. pp. 11.

(1) Bombay Gazetteer — Vol. XI. — Kolaba & Janjira pp. 111.

The brief historical citations ante are unfavourable to the concept that Chaul was or may have been the objective port of the refugee ancestors of the Beni-Israel. It is unreasonable to assume that when a safe asylum was existent in Egypt itself in a wholly Jewish environment during the period of the persecution of Antioclus Epiphanes, that even a small section of Palestine Jewry should deliberately elect to choose the hazard of a long voyage of more than 2000 miles to India to the Cheul haven and with which country and port Palestine maintained no contacts whatever and the living conditions therein were a sealed book. As history the concept enunciated is clearly inadmissable.

Lastly the tradition held by the Beni-Israel that their ancestors came from a country to the "North" as explained away by the author is not convincing. Allowing for the presence and infiltration of the exiled descendants of the inhabitants of the Northern Confederacy of Israel, assimilation by marriage and the growth of the nation into a single entity, unhampered by the distinctive tribal formations of old, and which was brought about during the period of the existence of the "Second Temple", together with the notable religious advance registered during the "Sopheric Epoch", gives the statement a construction wholly plausible and not one of fact. Having regard to the substance of the tradition and its definitive nature, and which even at the present day is tenaciously held by the Beni-Israel, it still remains an open question.

Notwithstanding the critique herein, the exposition by the author of the history of the Beni-Israel of the Bombay Presidency, is of very great value in preser-

ving intact those facts in respect of the mode of religious observances of the Beni-Israel ancients which otherwise would have deprived history of dependable factual material from an unimpeachable course. The measure of the influence of these ancient customs and rituals in satisfactorily resolving the issue of the origin of this old limb of the "Hebrews" settled for centuries on Indian soil, appear in the further development of the theme.

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PART II

THE PROBLEM OF ORIGIN

CHAPTER ONE

APPROACH TO THE SUBJECT

It is abundantly evident from contemporaneous history and findings of enquiries made under the aegis of government and recorded in the historical sections of the Bombay Government Gazetteers and the literature on the subject extant in the nineteenth century, that the "Beni-Israel" are undoubtedly part and parcel of the descendants of the seed of the great patriarch Abraham of Holy Writ. The observance by them during their sojourn for centuries in the land of the Hindus, of the Sabbath, the covenant of Abraham, i.e. the circumcision of all male infants when eight days old, and the dietary laws, which collectively are the three main characteristics by which Jewry the world over is easily identified from their neighbours of other faiths, have been found to be present amongst them from time immemorial. In the realm of advanced Judaism, however, they were known in the era prior to the middle of the 18th century, to be singularly lacking in the sphere of a knowledge of Hebrew and the forms of prayer common to their co-religionists elsewhere after the first dispersion from Palestine, the result of the teachings in the Sopheric age and thereafter. The advent of David Rahabi who came from Cochin at about the latter end of the seventeenth century A.D. for about five years and which was tragically interrupted when he was killed by a local chief in a remote village when going about in the midst of the Beni-Israel in the Konkan, may be said to have only touched the fringes of the religious revival set in train by that pious teacher.

It may been added that the Cochin Jews were well versed in the advanced practices of Judaism which were engrafted on them when in Babylon and later by contacts with Jews from Egypt, Holland, and other places who visited them from time to time. The basic fact that emerges may, therefore, preponderately be said to be that the Beni-Israel as a whole remained in isolation and in obscurity in their village homes in the Konkan, but nevertheless tenaciously clung to their distinct identity as members of the Hebrew race in spite of any disrupting influences that were present in their alien environment and the vicissitudes of fortune to which they, in common with the generality of mankind, may have been subject.

The most notable features of religious observances amongst them in the past on which much emphasis has been laid, is the recital by them of the formula of prayer known as the "Kiryat Shema" on all religious occasions such as birth, circumcision, marriage and death obsequies, and the scrupulous observance in strict conformity with the injunctions laid down in the Levitical code, of the mode of expatiating their vows, six out of nine mentioned in the Bible being observed by them. A third and very marked feature, is the tradition, extant even today, that their ancestors who were castaways on the coast of the Konkan near Navgaon, came from a "Province to the North". Its correct elucidation has hitherto eluded all attempts made for its solution The tenacity with which it is held for many ages, gives it special significance and as having some substance at least in fact and therefore not lightly to be discarded. These considerations may be said to inevitably lead to the tentative conception that material facts to form the basis for resolving the uncertain issue of origin,

concealed in the womb of time for centuries, and that as direct intercourse between Palestine on the one hand and India on the other, existed only when King Solomon and the later kings of Judah and Israel ruled in Palestine, that the period of history covering those eras should be traversed as likely to afford such substantive evidence as would serve as a working hypothesis.

The emigration of peoples from their homes and the formation of new colonies large and small, by communities seeking refuge from persecution or from invasion of their countries by foreign elements, have been numerous in the past and many such, especially those that have influenced the course of civilization amongst nations, have found a permanent place in history. In respect of a handful of men and women—seven of each in the case of the Beni-Israel-history cannot even remotely be said to be concerned with their fate. Yet doubtless by the Grace of that Unseen Benevolent Power which guides the destinies of men and nations, the Beni-Israel, the descendants of the castaways at Navgaon, now number 20,000 souls, who have midst good fortune and bad, risen to a stature surprisingly well favoured comparable in position and attainments with the best of the many communities in whose midst they have founded a permanent home. That they have emerged practically unscathed as a distinct entity of Jewry, tenaciously adhering to the faith of their fathers during the centuries of their sojourn amongst an alien people, may definitely be attributed to that inherent quality in the character of the descendants of ancient Israel which marks them as a peculiar people apart from all others, firmly clinging in storm and in stress, to the religious ideals inculcated by tradition and usage and which by

experience have been found to sustain them in the trials and tribulations throughout their generations in the midst of the many peoples amongst whom, by the caprices of fortune, they have been planted.

PART II

CHAPTER TWO

KING SOLOMON AND THE GOLDEN OPHIR

King Solomon succeeded to the throne of King David, his father, under the most favourable auspices. He was only 20 years of age (circa 975 B.C.E.) Tranquility reigned throughout the Jewish dominions as a result of the active measures taken by the late monarch. The youthful sovereign was credited with possessing wisdom of no mean order for his years Tradition asserts that his humble prayer when he visited the religious shrine at Gibeon, was to the effect that God should grant him the boon of an understanding heart to enable him to dispense true justice. This precious gift was not only vouchsafed to him but to it were added riches, honour and a long life (1).

As a result of the conquests of the late king, Solomon's kingdom extended as far as the Euphrates to the east and the borders of Tyre to the west. To the southwest the borders of Egypt were contiguous to those of Palestine. Towards the south, the Jewish king held sway over the territories comprised in Edom which included the Elanitic (Akaba) Gulf which was the right arm to the north of the Red Sea. As a result of his marriage with an Egyptian princess he acquired as a dowry the important port of Gaza. To the north the king's sovereignty extended over the former territories comprised in the Amorite and Aramean principalities and the Lebanon mountains inclusive of the ancient city of Damascus (2).

(1) Graetz — History of the Jews (Rhine)' Vol. I Ch. 4 p. 72.
(2) Ibid. Ch. 3. p. 59 and Hall — Ancient history of the Middle East p. 433 seq. See also. Psalm 728.

The absence of political disruptions made Solomon to increasingly foster the arts of peace. With the assistance of Hiram, King of Tyre and lord of the Phoenecians, whose friendship Solomon assiduously cultivated, as had his father king David, enabled, in the early years of the king's reign, for the magnificient Temple at Jerusalem to be built. The closer union of the scattered Jewish tribal elements was brought about by the prolonged festivities and religious ceremonials attendant on the dedication of the sacred edifice wherein a large number from far and near, participated. These solemnities not only excited the awe of the people and deep reverence for the God of their fathers, but indeliably impressed on their minds the lofty character of their ruler as a sovereign worthy of their esteem. The erection of the palaces of the King and his house-hold, separate stately edifices being provided, and the Hall of Audience where the king dispensed justice, and the magnificent mansions of the nobles, raised Jerusalem from obscurity and converted it into a famous and splendid city. Commerce flourished on account of these activities and increased the city's population. Greater prosperity was brought about by two important undertakings under the aegis of the king. The first was the encouragement of foreign trade elements to settle in and about Jerusalem so as to make it a central commercial emporium. The second was the ambitious enterprise to Ophir, in India, whereby the rich products for which India was famous, flowed into Jerusalem.

For many centuries the main entrepot trade centre for products of the middle east countries and those of India, was Baveru (Babylon)—merchants from the Near East carried their wares from the markets of Asia Minor, Palestine, Egypt, and the Mediterranean sea

board, to Baveru by well established caravan routes which now lay athwart the territories of the Jewish King. Direct trade routes from Egypt to Mesopotamia (Iraq) and from Phoenicia (Tyre and Sidon) to Arabia were enabled to be maintained and made free from brigandage. Tyre and Sidon at the time, were the main centres for the trade with countries bordering the Mediterranean Basin. The trade routes to Babylon were provided with protective cities, with good roads leading to them and fenced with walls, gates and bars (1). Baalath (Baslbec-Heliopolis) Tadmor (Palmyra) and Hamath (Epiphania) were among others, cities built by Solomon serving the mercantile interests of his own dominions and those outside it, such as Babylon, Ctesiphon, Selucia and Ossis which prospered for many centuries on the profits of their trade. The friendly Egyptain connection enabled markets to be established in Palestine for the sale of horses and war chariots which brought in a large revenue, merchants from the countries bordering the Jewish dominions thus avoiding the long and hazardous journey to Egypt to procure them (2).

Solomon's foresight in providing protective cities in his own dominions for eastern traders, enabled friendly intercourse to be maintained at a high level with a diversity of commercial interests intimately associated with the East and India and without doubt sowed the seeds of the enterprise for exploiting the profitable trade of India by tapping it direct by way of a sea route and thus avoiding not only the inherent losses that occurred via the slow and long caravan routes. but also enabling an increase in the quantity of merchandise to enter both countries and thereby foster greater prosperity. Many

(1) I.K.IX.18 & II Chron. VII 4, 5, 6.
(2) Graetz (Rhine) Vol. I. Chapter IV. p. 78.

favourable factors were present for embarking on such a scheme with success. That the Phoenicians were alive to the possibilities of direct trade intercourse with India is indicated by the fact that they were on friendly terms with the Egyptians and appear to have founded a settlement at Memphis and perhaps coveted port facilities also on the Egyptian Red Sea littoral. Evidence is lacking to show that they ever succeeded in accomplishing their desire (1). King Solomon, however, was more advantageously placed. Elath, an Edomite City of considerable importance, at the apex of the Gulf of Akaba, was within the territorial limits of a principality tributary to the king, while Eziongeber in the near vicinity of Elath, offered scope for building large sea going vessels of the type used by the Phoenicians in the Mediterranean (2). Solomon having married an Edomite princess (3) the friendly co-operation of the Edomities in the undertaking was assured.

Graetz remarks that although the Indian enterprise was beset with great difficulties, in conjunction with Hiram, a comparatively safe route was enabled to be opened to Ophir (4). The fact that the very first voyage to Ophir was an immense success, (5) is indicative of the reasonable concept that the undertaking was not a plunge in the dark, an impression apt to be conveyed by the bald Biblical account. To successfully navigate strange waters with a large fleet of cargo ships, must necessarily have entailed one or more preliminary exploratory voyages. It is conceivable that a survey of the sea route in a ship or ships of their own, during

(1) Rawlinson — Phoenicia, p. 70.
(2) K. ix 26.27.28.
(3) I.K. xi-1.3.
(4) Graetz (Bella Lowy). Vol. I. Ch. 9.
(5) I.K. ix. 28.

the period that the fleet of ships for the first voyage was being constructed at Eziongeber, or a survey in a ship or ships of a friendly nation, which traded with the Red Sea Ports and whose good-will and active assistance was secured, was undertaken. That the exploratory and even subsequent voyages to India were piloted by Indian Navigators can scarcely be doubted having regard to the fact that Indian ships traded with ports on the Arabian and African coasts and were the main carriers of the merchandise to and from the Persian Gulf which flowed to and from Baveru (Babylon).

Dr. Mookerji in his masterly study (1) "The history of Indian shipping from the earliest times" adduces well authenticated evidence from ancient Indian literature to prove that Indian merchants in Indian ships manned by Indian seamen, traversed well established open sea-lanes between India and Arabia and the broad expanse of the Persian Gulf for purposes of trade, large ships carrying two to five hundred people and even seven hundred, being employed. The entrepot for the trade via the Gulf was Baveru (Babylon) where the products of the Near East and Middle East countries were exchanged with those brought from India. The Vanias now known as Banias—a rich trading class—are mentioned as the principal Indian traders dealing directly with Baveru. The principal Indian ports were Bharukaccha identified with the modern Broach at the mouth of the Narbadda river, and Surparaka identified with Sopara (Sopir) the Ophir of Solomon, situated on the estuary of the Vaitarna river 300 miles south of Broach and 30 miles to the north of Bombay which was a great mercantile emporium in ancient days. The trade

(1) Dr. Radhakumud Mookerji — History of Indian Shipping etc. from the earliest times.

contacts between Babylon and India, it is stated, existed as from 3000 B.C.

The Arabs as a commercial nation, came into prominence after their conversion to Islam and their conquest of Egypt. The petty Arab principalities that dotted the Arabian coastal belt in ancient days were the only ones which engaged in trade, mainly horses and such products as wet and dry dates, exchanging these with the products of India—especially spices—as were brought to their doors in Indian ships by Indian merchants. Socotra Island at the entrance to the Gulf of Aden was the then rendezvous for Indian merchant ships. That an Indian ship in company with a Jewish cum Phoenician vessel piloted the initial exploratory voyage to India and direct tentative contacts made with Indian merchants at Ophir which was the entrepot for the merchandise from the interior of the Indian peninsula and from Ceylon and the Indian Archipelago, is well within the compass of the statement recorded by Graetz that Israelitish and Phoenician sea-men who knew the route to India thoroughly were employed in navigating King Solomon's cargo fleet that made the voyages to Ophir. It may be added that the large cargo to be transported from Elath for disposal at Ophir in exchange for the products of India—no less than 420 talents of gold equivalent to 4,000,000 sterling were realised from the first voyage (1)—made it imperative that the risk of loss should be thoroughly guarded against and every precaution to that end taken and this was doubtless able to be secured with the initial help of Indians who carried on an active trade with Arabia visiting Arabian sea ports and who were as intrepid mariners as the Phoenicians themselves. With the then known tendency of the

(1) I.K. IX. 28.

predatory pagan Arabs to plunder and kill at every opportunity that offered, the island of Socotra not far away from the African mainland and within easy distance of the southern Arabian shore, offered a safer haven to the Indian shipping to replenish their fresh water and procure their other necessities than anchorages in Arab dominated waters (1). Contacts with Indians thus were possible with the Phoenician and Jewish sea-men not far from the Jewish Red Sea commercial outlet at Elath and that such contacts were pre-arranged at Baveru with the Indians who traded there, in an acceptable proposition fairly evident having regard to the overwhelming success of the enterprise launched under the Jewish king's auspices.

A tribute to the Indian sea-manship of the time is afforded by the following excerpt from Rawlinson's "Intercourse between India and the Western World from the earliest times":

> "Sea borne trade between the Indus valley and the Euphrates existed in the 15th and 14th centuries B. C. Indians appear in those days to have been experienced sailors. Early Indian literature abounds in references to ships and sea-faring and bears testimony to the skill and daring of Hindu mariners in remote times. Evidently from early days, Indian sea-men built ships larger than those usually employed even at a much later date in the Mediterranean and how long ago, merchants sailed far out of sight of the coast taking shore sighting birds, which were released from time to time, in order that they might guide mariners to land".

(1) *Note* — There are mixed colonies of Indian origin in Socotra at the present day.

The Israelitish sea-men that jointly undertook the voyages to Ophir with the Phoenicians belonged to the two tribes of Asher and Zebulun (2). Hall (3) emphasises that the tribe of Asher on the Phoencian border was almost Phoenician itself having little sympathy with the less civilised tribes of the South. Further, that the sea-coast tribes of Dan and Asher (they occupied the sea-coast territory south of Phoenicia) (1) were already engaged in trading in imitation of the Phoenicians and were beginning to lose the fierce war-like energy displayed by the other tribes of Israel.

In the train of the Indian enterprise, an Israelite colony was planted by Solomon at Elath, ships being constructed at Eziongeber in the near vicinity. Highways were provided for the transit of merchandise to and from Jerusalem which became a famous mart in the East rivalling Babylon and attracting a large number of foreigners, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomities and Egyptians. The Phoenician merchants founded an independent colony in the environs of the city under the protection of Hiram following their own laws, customs and religious worship (4). Israelite centres of trade were also established at Sanna and Hariba in the Yemen (Arabia Felix), the products of Southern Arabia thus finding their way to Ophir and Jerusalem in Israelitish ships. Towards the end of Solomon's reign Edom re gained its independence and the Indian trade came to an end. On Solomon's death, his kingdom was divided into the two Confederacies of Judah to the South under Rehoboam, and Israel to the north under Jeroboam. Ap-

(2) I.K. IX. 26.27.28. Graetz (Rhine) Vol. I. Chap. IV. p. 78.
(3) Hall — Ancient history of the Near East 402-415.

(1) Joshua XIX — Judges V. 17.
(4) Graetz (Rhine) Vol. I. Chap. IV. p. 79.

proximately one hundred and fifty years afterwards the commerce with Ophir was renewed under the aegis of the later kings of both Judah and Israel. The salient relative features thereof are embodied in the next chapter. Unlike the first undertaking, the Phoenicians were not associated with the Israelites in the second venture, the seamen cum merchants of the tribes of Asher and Zebulun being the sole participants.

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PART II

CHAPTER THREE

INDIA AND THE LATER KINGS OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL

Towards the end of Solomon's reign the pacifist policy that was followed by him led to the disintegration of his kingdom. Edom in the South, Philista to the South-west and Syria in the North, regained their independence. After Solomon's death, due to the weakness of his successor Rehoboam, his son, the northern tribes under the leadership of Jeroboam, an Ephramite, revolted and established the Confederacy of Israel. Jeroboam was a refugee in Egypt and had sought an asylum there having fled when the uprising he had engineered among the tribes of Mannesha and Ephrahim during Solomon's reign, proved abortive. Sheshenk the first king of a new dynasty in Egypt, having repudiated the friendly alliance that existed in Solomon's time, invaded Palestine in the first years of the reign of his successor. Sheshenk was content to return to Egypt after plundering the rich treasures of the Temple. Jeroboam during the confusion that ensued and probably encouraged by Sheshenk, led the northern tribes to break their ties with Judah. The northerners elected Jeroboam King of the new Israel Confederacy. The local intestine conflicts between Judah and Israel that ensued and the wide differentiation in religious worship that occurred Jeroboam having introduced the cult of the bull-calf in Israel and having forbidden pilgrimages to the Temple at Jerusalem for the high festivals fearing a possible reconciliation with Judah—effectively destroyed collaboration in restoring even a semblance of

the commercial prosperity so assiduously promoted by Solomon during his reign. With the loss of Edom the commerce with Ophir was abandoned. History is silent as to the fate of the cargo fleet that existed. The Phoenicians were out of the picture as much as the Israelites due to the hostile attitude of Egypt and Edom towards Rehoboam. Such of the Jewish mariners as had married Edomite women following the example of Solomon in marrying an Edomite princess, probably remained in the colony founded at Elath. The majority dispersed to their homes to the far north of the Confederacy of Israel (1) (2) (3).

It was during the reign of Azariah (Uzziah) (805-754 B.C.) of Israel, approximately 150 years after Solomon's death, that the direct trade route by sea to Ophir was re-opened. Azariah invaded and reduced Edom to subjection and the City of Elath at the apex of the Gulf of Akaba was re-annexed to Judah. Jeroboam II by conquest extended the boundaries of Israel from the Lebanon to the city of Hamath in the caravan route to the Euphrates and Babylon. Syria (Aram) and the petty principalities over which Syria held sway became tributary to Israel. The impluse to trade brought about a rapprochement between Judah and Israel whereby riches made their appearance in the two kingdoms—Graetz states:—

> "Not only the king, but even the noble classes made a great display even more so than in King Solomon's time. King Jeroboam 11 possessed a winter and

(1) I.K. XI — 21-23 & II. Chron. xii-9.
(2) Graetz (Bella Lowy) Vol. I. Chapter IX. pp. 180-181. —do— (Ribbi Rhine) Vol. I. Chapter IV. p. 82 & Chapter V. p. 86. Hall — Ancient History of the Middle East pp. 437 to 439.
(3) I.K. XI. 1.

a summer palace. Houses formed of great blocks of stone, inlaid with ivory and furnished with ivory seats, became very common. In contemplating the increase of power in the two kingdoms, one could almost give way to the illusion that the times of Solomon were still enduring and that no further change had occurred except that two kings were ruling instead of one".

It is asserted that Israelites were permitted to make pilgrimages unmolested to Beersheba and even to visit the Temple at Jerusalem, apparently valued privileges intended to foster closer and more friendly relations between the citizens of the two kingdoms.

The Jewish colony at Elath was re-established (1). This fact is suggestive of the reasonable concept that the northern confederacy of Israel was again to the fore in enlisting the services of the sea-faring tribes of Asher and Zebulum in what may be termed as a joint enterprise, Judah having no seamen within its borders. The Phoenicians were not associated with the Israelites as in King Solomon's time, due to a civil war in their midst which impelled many families to emigrate to the northern shores of Africa where new Phoenecian colonies came into existence. The Israelite merchants cum sea-men of the tribes mentioned could not but have been animated by the desire to make the second venture to Ophir as outstanding a success as the first undertaking. The insecurity that prevailed in Phoenicia on the borders of which they had their tribal enclaves and the hazard of following their mercantile pursuits under conditions adverse to profitable trade, doubtless induced sufficiently large numbers to establish new homes in the colony at

(1) I.K. XIV-22.

Elath. Their skill and experience as ship-wrights, navigators and merchants trading with the countries bordering the Mediterranean Basin and those of the Near and the Middle East generally on the pattern of the Phoenicians, could not have been enriched during 150 years after Solomon's death. It may reasonably be assumed that the initial difficulties they may have encountered in their new environment however great, if not greater, than in Solomon's time, were easily overcome and this doubtless made for the appearance of the great riches in both Judah and Israel stressed by Graetz.

On Uzziah's death, his son Jotham who had been nominated as regent during the long illness of his father, ascended the throne of Judah (754-739 B.C.). His contemporary in Israel was Pekah (755-736 B.C.). Jotham maintained friendly relations with Pekah and adhered to the policy followed by his father; intimacy between the two sovereigns is particularly stressed and the ships of Tarshish continued to navigate the Red Sea which enabled the acquisition of great riches and glory.

It will be observed from the foregoing that there is a gap of 14 years as from the death of Jeroboam II in 769 B.C. to the accession of Pekah in 755 B.C. This period was marked by great anarchy in Israel. Zachariah who succeeded his father Jeroboam II, was assassinated within six months by one Shallum who usurped the throne. Shallum exterminated the entire family of Jeroboam II. Shallum within a month of his accession, was murdered by one Menahaim who was declared king. Menahaim ruled from 769 to 757 B. C. During his reign Assyria overran Israel taking captives and laying waste the country. Menahaim staved off dethronement by paying a large indemnity to Pul, the Assyrian king. When Menahaim died, his son Pekahaiah (circa 757-756 B.C.)

who succeeded him, was murdered by his Charioteer, Pekah, who became king of Israel. Pekah fearing another invasion by the new Assyrian King, Tiglath Pilesser, whose ambitious designs to extend his empire also affected the many principalities on the borders of Israel, as also an Egyptian advance into Palestine under a new king, Sabako, joined an offensive and defensive alliance promoted by Aram (Syria) which again had a king, Razin, at Damascus the capital. Jotham of Judah according to Graetz agreed to join the confederacy of the principalities bordering on Judah and Israel formulated by Damascus. Jotham's sudden death made Ahaz who succeeded him, to withdraw from the pact whereupon Pekah and his ally Razin, invaded Judah (2).

The reason for the unprovoked attack on Judah as given by Hall (1) is to the effect that under Azariah (Uzziah) and Jotham a Judhaite hegemony over Israel was brought into being due to the anarchy that existed in that kingdom. Azariah brought the Israel dependencies under his sway as recorded in Chron. II. XVI 6-15 and which is amply supported by Assyrian evidence. Hall adds that the invasion of Judah atcually occurred when Ahaz succeeded to the throne, the ephemeral supremacy of Judah over Israel being bitterly resented.

During Jotham's reign the commercial products from the markets of the Near and Middle East countries and the Mediterranean Basin and which had to be transported to Elath for export to Ophir could not but have progressively decreased in volume in spite of the hegemony of Judah over Israel due to the insecurity and confusion prevailing in Phoenicia and Israel, the main trade routes

(2) Graetz (Rhine) Popular history of the Jews Chap. VI. pp. 125-128.

(1) Hall — Ancient history of the middle East pp. 462 to 464.

lying athwart the territories of the two dominions. Fewer voyages with a smaller cargo fleet from Elath to Ophir made for correspondingly diminished imports into Israel of the products of India. The objective of Pekah and Razin in promoting a defensive and offensive alliance may thus have been inspired to ensure security on the trade routes to infuse greater confidence in foreign traders on their borders and so maintain the high standard of the profits that had brought wealth to both Judah & Israel.

Further it is pertinent to here observe that the Charioteer king of Israel perhaps entertained a lurking ambition of eventually founding a powerful kingdom such as that over which king Solomon held sway. With well filled coffers from the India trade after the elimination of Judah by conquest, Israel could become powerful enough to absorb the petty principalities round about. Assyria was doubtless a formidable rival but the Assyrians were not a commercial nation and were satisfied with levying tribute. As regards Egypt a new dynasty, the Ethiopian conquest, had yet to consolidate its power in the country and could not engage for some time in new adventures outside its borders.

By greatly strengthening his fighting forces and the defensive outposts in his own dominions and on its borders, as also similar measures on the part of the satellites who had made common cause with Israel, and above all, eliminating Judah by conquest, the Israel king would gradually be enabled to build up a formidable power block that would be able to hold its own against both Egypt and Assyria. Graetz asserts that the avowed objective of Pekah and Razin was to dethrone Ahaz, destroy the house of David, and instal one Ben-Tabel, an ally, as King of Judah.

The initial successes gained by the allied forces of Pekah and Razin were overwhelming. The Bible in II.K.XVI.5 and II Chron XXVIII 5.6.8. records that 1,20,000 all valiant men of Judah were slain in one day, a great multitude of them being carried captive by Razin (Aram) to Damascus; further that two hundred thousand women, sons and daughters and much spoil were taken by Israel to Samaria. These latter were later released and send to Jericho. II. Chron. XXVIII 15.16. A considerable force thereafter descended into Edom and drove away the Jhudans from Elath II.K. XVI.6. Edom as a new found ally of Pekah and Rasin attacked Judah and carried away captives. II Chron. XXVIII.17. The incursion into Elath and Judah was apparently to take captive the Judhaite soldiery that protected the caravan route to Jerusalem and maintained order at the Colony at Elath to safeguard the merchandise coming in and going out to Ophir. Graetz avers that the Aramean army expelled all the Judhans who had settled at Elath since the days of Solomon or Amaziah. The English translation (revised version) of verse 6. Ch. XVI. II Kings, reads "At that time Razin, King of Syria, recovered Elath to Syria and drove away the Jews?" Judhans—the Hebrew text uses the term "Eth-Ha-Eheudim" meaning Judhans from Elath "and the Syrians came to Elath and dwelt there upto this day" indicative of the fact that the Syrians replaced the Judhaite garrison and such other Judhan personnel kept at Elath to safeguard the civil establishments that existed for handling and otherwise controlling the quasi-governmental trade interest under Judah The allied forces of Razin and Pekah in the interim marched on Jerusalem and besieged the city(1).

(1) Graetz — Popular history of the Jews (Rhine) Vol. I. Chap. VI. p. 138.

NOTE — This portion of Graetz's history is omitted in Bella Lowy's translation.

In the sore straits in which he found himself, Ahaz, instead of surrendering to Israel and Razin as was perhaps expected by them, sent secret messengers to Tiglath-Pillesser of Assyria appealing for help II. chron. XXVIII-16-offering himself as a vassal, his kingdom to form part of the Assyrian Empire (2). The Assyrian monarch promptly responded and descended upon the confederate enemies of Judah with a heavy hand. The entire kingdom of Aram (Damascus) was conquered and Razin put to death; the territory was annexed and the name Aram extinguished. Later it was called Syria, a short form of Assyria. Damascus was colonised by Assyrians.

Tiglath-Pillesser next invaded Israel, captured the fortified mountain cities, the region of the sea and of the river Jordan and the territories of the sea-faring tribes of Asher, Zebulum and Dan and also the enclave of the tribe of Naphthali;(3) Pekah thereupon made his submission to Tiglath-Pilesser; the kingdom of Israel was reduced to half its former size and became a vassal of Assyria(1).

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(2) Ibid — Vol. I. Ch. XIV. p. 266 (Bella Lowy) & Vol. I. Ch. VI. p. 133. (Rhine) Hall — Ancient history of the Middle East. p. 464.

(3) *Note* — In the era of the Caliphate of Mahomed-al-Muktafi circa 1136-1160 A.D., the exilarch (Jewish prince of the exile) of Bagdad had jurisdiction over the Jews of NISHABUR — Khorasan, — Persia — who regarded themselves as descendants of the tribes of Dan, Zebuben, Asher, and Napathali. See Graetz (Rhine) Vol. III. p. 253.

(1) Graetz (Rhine) Vol. I. pp. 138-139.

Note—Hall states that the enslavement of Israel was postponed for the moment, by the murder of Pekah by Hosea who immediately made his submission to Tiglath-Pilessar.

The territory east of the Jordan, Gallilee and Naphthali with the towns of Hazor, Kadesh and several others were annexed to Assyria and the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Mennasha carried away captive(2) being replaced by captives from Armenia and colonists from Babylon and elsewhere in the empire(3). The desert frontier of Egypt was placed under the surveillance of a Beduin chief styled "The Kipu of Musri" the whole of Palestine (Judah & Israel) being under the control of governors called "Shuparshaku" (military commandant) or a "Bel Pikati" (district lord). The neighbouring states viz Ammon Moah and Edom were compelled to pay tribute to **Assyria(4).**

During the initial successful operations of the allies Pekah and Razin, in the war on Judah, the northern tribal elements settled in the colony at Elath controlling the trade and shipping centred at the port, were doubtless actively engaged in promoting the interests of the allies to such extent as was possible, commerce having come to a stand-still. A small group was necessarily retained to maintain and safeguard the cargo fleet at its anchorage and the construction yards at Eziongeber to enable the resumption of the voyages to Ophir as soon as practicable after the conquest of Judah was accomplished. Many, especially the younger and able-bodied, voluntarily took up or were impressed in the service of the allies in various fields of war activity. A considerable number may even have taken the opportunity to visit their territorial enclaves to ascertain the prevailing conditions there and the safety of their kith and kin.

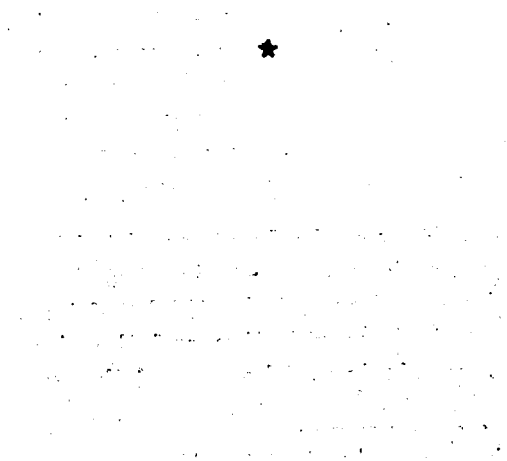
(2) II. Kings XVII. Generally described as the first captivity.

(3) Hall—Ancient history of the Middle East p. 465.

(4) Ibid—p. 465.

The unexpected turn of events on the intervention and domination of Assyria over Israel, Judah and Edom, thus brought about the complete isolation of the northern sea-men at Elath and Eziongeber doubtless a small number, some burdened with families and who had elected or had been chosen on that account to maintain the cargo fleet. As a prudential protective measure as soon as the Assyrian menace asserted itself, these isolated elements were impelled to remove themselves, their families and their movable effects and such provisions as they required and could lay their hands on, to one or two sea-worthy vessels and await the final outcome of the Assyrian onslaught which also threatened Edom. The subjugation of their tribal territory, the enslavement of Israel which kingdom was reduced by half and the subservience of Judah and Edom left scant hope, if any, of finding a safe asylum on the soil of Palestine. Safe conduct was non-existent as even if a refuge in some other tribal enclave offered security the hazards of travel through occupied territory would possibly entail slavery for themselves and their families if not death, and the loss of their effects. The only possible safe refuge they could envisage was Ophir where they were well known and where they were sure to meet with hospitality from their trade connections and where Indians as well as merchants professing different faiths, lived in amity and were unmolested. Sanna and Hariba in Arabia Felix, although centres of Jewish trade, were in territory where slavery flourished and where they could not possibly be able to continue to command that influence with the predatory pagan Arabs that they enjoyed as merchants visiting their shores Ophir moreover held out the forlorn hope that through the good offices of Indian merchants trading with Baveru (Babylon) they would be in a position to know the fate of their country and possibly they or their

children, if conditions warranted, be able to rejoin their kith and kin. These considerations made for the small isolated group of Israelites to forthwith seek security on Indian soil at Ophir. One or at most two vessels probably sufficed for the voyage. In the near vicinity of their objective they appear to have been blown by a tempest 35 miles southward. Their ship or ships foundered, seven men and seven women being saved, the rest of the company finding a watery grave. It is from these castaways on the Navagaon beach on the Konkan coast washed by the Arabian Sea, that the Beni-Israel are derived as will be abundantly evident from their further history, religious and incidental. The datum of this event may be set down at about the period 732-730 B.C. the respective Jewish kings in Palestine being Ahaz in Judah and Hosea in Israel.



PART II

CHAPTER FOUR

ORIGIN RELATIVE TO THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT.

The aniconic worship of the one and only God of Israel (Yhvh Yaveh-Jehovah) may be said to have been more firmly implanted among the Israelites during the reign of King Solomon after the dedication of the Temple at Jerusalem. All Israelites were wont to go to the Temple for the High festivals as enjoined in the Hebrew Scriptures (1) the Temple replacing the sanctuary. Those as were able, made pilgrimages to Jerusalem to make their offerings and expatiate their vows. Solomon made the office of the High Priest hereditary to the descendants of Aaron. The history of the Shema(2) reveals that appropriate set prayers, mostly the singing of psalms and exhortations from the precepts laid down in the Peutateuch and with which the priests only were familiar, were intoned and the precepts explained to the assembled congregants within the Temple precincts; in addition the daily sacrifices which were an integral part of the religious ritual then in vogue under the direct auspices of the high priest, were offered. At the conclusion of the services the assembly said Amen and intoned the "Kiryat Shema" with which only they were familiar(3).

The general body of the Levites assisted the priests, singing psalms and playing the musical instruments. They were the guardians of the "Holy of Holies" and the sacred vessels from pollution and the cleansing of of the Temple precincts and keepers of the gates. The

(1) Leo XXIII 4 & Deut XVI-16
(2) Hertz (Chief Rabbi) The Peutateuch p. 920 seq:-
(3) *Note*—A sentence of six Hebrew words "Baruch Shem" was added to the "Kiryat Shema" in the "Sopheric epoch" when the Second Temple existed by the "Sopherim" or wise men.

majority were scattered throughout the kingdom ministering to the religious wants of the people in respect of domestic occurrences, such as births and deaths and the observance of the hygienic laws as enjoined. They calculated and announced the actual dates on which the various festivals were to be observed as proclaimed in Jerusalem and which dates conformed at the period to the lunar calendar dependent on the visible appearance of the new moon(1). The religious practices thus built up may be said to have gradually stabilised the pattern of the religious lives of the proletariat in general in the mould of the simple ceremonials laid down by the great Law giver, Moses. The colony at Elath was also doubtless similarly served. Besides the merchant cum seamen and shipwrights of the tribes of Asher and Zebulum, there were also the armed guards mostly Judhans, who protected the colonists and the valuable cargoes of merchandise; they also policed the caravan routes to Jerusalem. The services of the Edomites were doubtless also utilised to a considerable extent for loading and unloading the ships in the port.

With the formation of the confederacy of Israel, Jeroboam the king, introduced the cult of the bull-calf (symbolic of fertility) in the territories occupied by the ten northern tribes. Fearing a possible reconciliation with Judah, he forbade pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Graetz observes that the new cult did not conflict with the deep seated concept of the Unity of God amongst the general body of the Israelites(2). Modern scholars are inclined

(1) *Note*—Beacon fires were kindled on hill tops to announce the Rosh Kodesh or New Moon as testified by witnesses, the fire on the Mount of Olives being the signal for lighting the others throughout the country. This ensured fasts and festivals to be observed on the same day by all the people. Graetz (Rhine. Vol. II. p. 171).

(2) Graetz—Popular history of the Jews (Rhine) Vol. I. Ch. V. pp. 88.

to the more favourable view that as the bull calves merely supported the mercy seat instead of the cherubim as in Solomon's Temple in the new shrines established by Jeroboam, at Dan and Bethel, no actual change occurred in the mode of worship, the daily sacrifices not being dispensed with(1). Dan and Bethel as the main centres of worship in Israel were chosen by Jeroboam as they were already regarded as holy places and served the convenience of both the northern and southern tribes(2). The Levites however refused to subscribe to the innovation of Jeroboam and returned to Judah. Jeroboam thereupon appointed as priests who-ever he could get to perform the office and he himself officiated as high priest during the great festivals. The people of the northern confederacy thus accustomed themselves to visit the new shrines, otherwise they made their offerings at home or at some other nearby shrines which existed of old. Graetz adds that the new cult continued throughout the existence of the Northern kingdom, not even one of Jeroboam's successors attempting to modify it(3).

The nature of the religious rites conducted in the home is nowhere stated. The number of competent substitutes available to replace the Levites who returned "en masse" to Judah could not but have been small. The reasonable assumption is thus warranted that following the example of their king, very many adopted the role and as psuedo Levites, ministered to the religious needs of themselves and their near neighbours, the large body of the proletariat resident in the Confederacy thus being able to be easily served in respect of all religious rites and ceremonies. This aspect is patently reflected in the

(1) Martin Buber—Moses—Essay the Bull and the Ark.
(2) Graetz—Popular history of the Jews (Rhine) Vol. I. Chapter V. p. 87.
(3) Ibid—p. 88.

practices of the Beni-Israel of the Bombay Konkan regions from time immemorial and found with modifications, as set prayers are now said—among the majority even at the present day. The Beni-Israel throughout their sojourn in the Bombay Konkan regions followed the precepts in the Levitcal code (Lev. Chap. VII & XII) in respect of the offerings they made at home and the hygienic and dietary laws as prescribed in the Hebrew scriptures. A close study of the ceremonies they followed, and still follow, show diversity to a negligible extent attributable, it may reasonably be inferred, to the lapse of time and a changed environment, especially the lack of religious institutions e.g. shrines, altars and so forth, as in Palestine. The concept that a pseudo-Levite or a Judhaite Levite was amongst them when they left Elath and that he was one of the castaways on the Navgaon beach, cannot altogether be ruled out, as will be manifest from the fuller details hereafter recorded. It may be added that the practice of burning frank incense on the occasion of the offerings at home found amongst the ancient and modern Beni-Israel, can be attributed in the main to the parallel customs prevailing in Israel, frank incense being freely burnt not only at the established shrines as a part of the prescribed ritual but as a scrupulous religious obligation in conformity with the prevailing belief of the times, to maintain that purity and sanctity in respect of the home offerings as would have been conferred if the offerings were made at the main shrines in conformity with the ceremonials as at the Temple at Jerusalem. It may also reasonably be assumed that the only prayer that was intoned at the home ceremonials was the "Kiryat Shema", qualified officiants such as the Levites in Judah, being non-resident in Israel. This practice thus was followed by the ancient Beni-Israel in the Konkan.

After the death of Jeroboam (977-955 B.C.) anarchy reigned in Israel until the accession of Oomri circa 926 B.C. Nadab, Jeroboam's son, who succeeded him, was murdered by Bassha, a soldier, who usurped the throne and exterminated Jeroboam's family. Elath, Bassha's son who succeeded him, was given to idleness and drunkenness and was assassinated by one Zimri, a servant, who massacred Bassha's descendants. Zimri however was king for only one week circa 932 B.C., the army, then engaged in a war with the Philistines, electing the Commander, Oomri, as king. Zimri who had entrenched himself in Tirzah, the then capital of Israel, was besieged by Oomri's forces. A breach having been effected in the walls of the citadel and realising his helplessness, Zimri set fire to the palace and threw himself in the flames. One Tibri, thereupon finding many adherents opposed Oomri and a Civil war lasting four years 932-928 B.C. ensued. Oomri's forces eventually gained the upper hand. Tibni was captured and put to death. Oomri thereupon was proclaimed King of Israel.

The first act of the new king was to found another capital as Tirzah was a hot-bed of intrigue and assassination. He selected Samaria, (Shomron), six miles from Sechem as the new seat of his government and peopled it with soldiers and civilians faithful to his cause. The name of the new city Samaria, which came into existence one year after Oomri's accession (927 B.C.) and which later rivalled Jerusalem, was used to designate the whole of the territories comprised in and hitherto known as Israel and which designation has continued to be used ever since.

Another undertaking of the new king was to maintain friendly relations with his powerful neighbours of Judah and Phoenicia in order to foster trade and make Samaria rich and prosperous. He entered into alliances with both, the ties with Phoenicia being cemented by

the marriage of Ahab—Oomri's son, with Jezebel the daughter of Ethobal (Ethbaal) the priest king whose accession was also marked by misrule leading to anarchy and civil war which had enfeabled the kingdom. Yet a third project which Oomri entertained was to Cannanise the religion of Samaria to bring Phoenicia and Samaria closer together and thereby foster intimate commercial relations between the two countries. Graetz remarks that Ahab—Oomri's son, through his connection with Phoenicia, was able to erect a palace of ivory for himself which even Solomon could not afford. This convinced Oomri of the wisdom of initiating a policy whereby the barriers of religion, which was a stumbling block, was removed and thus make way not only for the greater prosperty of Samaria but ultimately bring about a permanent territorial merger of the two kingdoms. Before Oomri could enforce his policy to revolutionise the religious beliefs of the Israelites, he died. His son Ahab (922-901), who succeeded him on the throne, was a weakling and was domineered over by his wife, Jezebel, who was a woman of a strong and determined character. She took an active part in the affairs of state and forthwith set about energetically to wean Israel from the religion of its fathers. Jezebel erected a temple to the gods of the Phoenicians at Samaria and imported a host of priests and priestesses. The idols of Baal and Astarte were installed and the priests and priestesses made their appearance in many cities and villages, besides the capital, in order to spread the new cults, the expenses being met from the king's treasury. The sensuous nature of the new form of worship appears to have appealed more to the wealthy than the other classes of the population. Many staved off persecution by publicly worshipping Baal while following Yahveh in secret. It was at this time that the great prophet "Elijah", made his appearance declaring Yahveh alone

as God. Elijah gained a large following and his disciples travelled from city to city. Elijah and his disciples called the people together and exhorted them to discard the new idol cults as false and adhere to their ancient faith. The miracle that occurred through his intercession and so picturesquely described in IK.XVIII-21-40, when the priests of Baal were massacred to a man, doubtless made a profound impression throughout the land The waverers in Israel as from this period followed the true faith of their fathers. Monotheism pure and simple, it may be inferred, thenceforth came into permanent being in Israel(1).

Ahab appears to have left the prophet and his followers alone as he was involved in two wars on his frontier with Ben Hadad II, King of Aram. In a great battle on the Plain of Jezreel he defeated Ben Hadad and took him prisoner but released him on his undertaking to restore all the territory conquered by Ben Hadad I, during the reign of Oomri. As this promise was not fulfilled a second campaign was launched, Ahab enlisting the assistance of the King of Judah, Jeosphaphat, whose son, Jeoharam, was married to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. In a sanguinary conflict at the important city fortress of Ramoth-Gilead Ahab was wounded and his forces defeated. He succumbed to his wounds and was succeeded by his son Ahaziah whose reign was brief circa 901-900 B.C. Jehoram his brother, succeeded (899-887 B.C.). Elijah at about this time disappeared having cast his mantle of prophecy on Elisha who continued the good work of his teacher and master in Samaria. The idolatrous practices continued in Samaria during Jehoram's reign

(1) Graetz—Popular history of the Jews (Rhine) Vol. I. pp. 91 et seq.

but he was not zealous in pressing them on the people(1). Jeosphaphat, King of Judah, having died, his son Jehoram, succeeded (894-888 B.C.). Influenced by his wife Athaliah, Baal worship was also introduced in Jerusalem. Samaria at about the end of Jehoram's reign was again at war with Aram. Jehoram was wounded and retired to Jezereel to recover, Jehu a captain in the army continuing the campaign. The army officers with Jehu at their head, took the opportunity to rebel against their absent and wounded monarch. Jehu sought out Jehoram at his retreat at Jezereel; on the king asking Jehu if he came in peace, Jehu reproached him for the idolatrous practices introduced in Samaria by Jezebel, bringing misery to the people. Jehoram was struck by an arrow when he turned to flee and was killed. Ahazaiah, king of Judah, who had recently ascended the throne on the death of his father and who had gone to visit his uncle the wounded monarch of Samaria at Jezereel, was also killed by Jehu. Jehu exterminated the descendants of Oomri and was elected king 887-859 B.C. By his energetic action he banished the cult of Baal from Samaria. In Judah however the queen mother, Athaliah, assumed the reigns of government and continued the heathen worship, the priests in the Temple only being permitted to carry on the ancient mode of worship. For six years — 857-851 B.C. — Athaliah regulated the political and religious affairs of Judah, some of the noble families supporting her regime. It is asserted that Athaliah on hearing of her son's death at the hands of Jehu, destroyed the house of David employing mercenaries in her pay(2). An infant prince, Joash one year old, was saved by the High priest Jehodiah and hidden in the Temple. When seven years old, Joash was proclaimed king, the high priest in the interim having gained many adherents to the prince's

(1) Graetz—Popular history of the Jews (Rhine) Vol. I. p. 102.
(2) Graetz—(Rhine) Vol. p. 107.

cause, Athaliah was killed by her own guards when on her way to the Temple where the proclamation was being made. The population destroyed all vestiges of the Baal cult in Jerusalem and the ancient worship of the God of Israel was fully restored.

For approximately 60 years during the reigns of Jehu (887-859 B.C.), Jehoahaz (859-845 B.C.) and Joash (845-830 B.C.) idol worship was non-existent in Samaria. Jeroboam II (836-769 B.C.) re-introduced the cult of Baal. Zechariah, Jeroboam II's son was murdered within six months of his accession, Shallum the assassin who usurped the throne, meeting with the same fate within a month thereof at the hands of Menahaim (769-757 B.C.) The usurper introduced the cult of Mylitta, the goddess of love, in Samaria, after the pattern of the Assyrians who had invaded Samaria and had been bought off by the payment of a large sum of money. The new cult as a gesture of subservience of Samaria to Assyria involved the renunciation of virtue and an immoral mode of life and Baal worship received a set back.

In Judah anarchy also made its appearance after the death of Jehodiah the high priest, who was the sole mentor of the young king, Joash (880-843 B.C.). The princes, nobles and palace officials taking advantage of the youthful monarch's inexperience gained the upper hand in state and religious affairs. A conspiracy resulted in the assassination of the king. Amazaiah (843-816 B.C.) Joash's son, who was elevated to the throne, meeting with the same fate as his father. For approximately 10 years thereafter no king ruled in Judah. The people of Jerusalem and its environs rose in revolt, killed the assassins of Amaziah and enthroned his son Azariah (Uzziah) (805-754 B.C.). Uzziah's conquest of Edom paved the way for the restoration of the com-

merce with Ophir in conjunction with Jeroboam II of Samaria. Uzziah earlier in his reign, however fell out with Samaria on the ostensible pretext that Joash of Samaria had refused to give his daughter in marriage to his son. An intestine conflict on the border at Beth-Shemesh resulted in Judah being invaded by the forces of Samaria. Jerusalem was plundered and the Temple despoiled of its treasures; Samaria withdrew after taking hostages for the good behaviour of Judah.

The rapprochement in respect of the commerce to Ophir was perhaps affected to a negligible extent by the anarchy that prevailed in both kingdoms. During Uzziah's long illness and Jotham's regency the princes of Judah and Samaria consequent on the riches that flowed into the country from the India commerce, mingled freely with each other and the greatest excesses followed, so much so that those of Samaria were called the "Drunkards of Ephraim". The Judahaite princes in imitation of those of Samaria followed their own mode of worship notwithstanding the fact that the Temple services remained unaffected.

It is evident from the foregoing that the virus of idolatry infested the aristocracy to a much greater extent than the common people. These latter were able to ward off any idolatrous permeations in their ancient faith by the exhortations of the prophets and their desciples who made their appearance in their midst in Samaria and also in Judah. After Elijah and Elisha the prophets Amos, Joel and Hosea I followed by Isaiah with his contemporaries Zachariah, Hosea II and Micah, exhorted the people to eschew the idolatrous practices which the ruling powers had introduced or were trying to introduce in the kingdom as it was the source of cruelty and injustice. They represented the God of their fathers as the only true and righteous God who delighted

in truth and right conduct. The inspired prophetical activities of the principals and the zeal and earnestness of their many disciples and followers, doubtless bore fruit and brought about stability in the ancient faith in the peoples generally of the two kingdoms. The enslavement of Samaria with its kingdom reduced by half, and the flower of its inhabitants carried into captivity, and the humiliating subservience of Judah as an appanage of Assyria, indicate that the aristocracy in both kingdoms paid scant attention to the exhortations of the Prophets. Political instability combined with perversions in their ancient faith, brought the strife between two brother kingdoms to an inglorious end both losing their heritage and independence at the same time.

In the context of the preceding observations, the tribal elements of Asher and Zebulun were probably affected to a very negligible extent in respect of their ancient faith. The tribes in question were isolated in the far north-west of Samaria, Asher occupying the territory in Galalee on the coast of Sidon (Zidon) and Zebulum on the Palestine coast proper. The calling of the majority entailed the long absence of sons, husbands and fathers on the high seas and in foreign lands. A considerable number were necessarily shipwrights engaged in the construction of the ships of Tarshish—large ships—and the repairs to such vessels of their cargo fleets to make them sea-worthy. Agricultural avocations and such home industries as oil pressing-Samaria as a whole produced more oil than the actual wants of its inhabitants—were the other occupations of not a few; commercial contacts on their borders and beyond for the promotion of trade with adjoining countries were not the least of the activities in which a goodly number were engaged.

In the initial stages of their tutelage under the aegis of the Phoenicians whose king Hiram, was the faithful

ally of both kings David and Solomon, these two tribal elements intermingled with their neighbours to not an inconsiderable extent. The barrier of religion kept the two entities apart, social and cultural links of an enduring nature being unable to be forged by the very nature of the avocations in which they were engaged viz. the promotion of commerce. In the voyages to Ophir in the time of Solomon, both Israelites and Phoenicians were closely associated. After Solomon's death, the Israelitish seamen cum merchants under Hiram's successors, having regard to the experience they had gained, were enabled to hold their own in the commercial field in friendly competition with their neighbours History does not record any disruption of the mercantile activities of both in the background of any rivalry for securing greater gains to the disadvantage of either; each appears to have had full freedom of commerce in territories which did not come within the ambit of any recognised special interests arrived at by mutual arrangement. That the Phoenicians attempted at any time to induct the peoples of the two tribes on their borders into following their religious cults either by coercion or persuasion, is also not evident. As eye witnesses perhaps to many a sensual orgy by the votaries of Baal (Adomis) and Astarte (Aphrodite or Ashtoreth) their feelings could not but have been one of disgust. The priests of Baal painted their faces to give them a hideous appearance. They dressed in female garb and dancing and howling to the accompaniment of drums, cymbals, rattles and trumphets, bowing their heads alternately to the ground and trailing them in the dust, worked themselves into a frenzy. They then inflicted wounds on their bodies with knives which they carried, the blood which flowed being offered as a sacrifice to the idols. On occasion, some even emasculated themselves and their ghastly apearance in the procession of priests and

priestesses exposed to the full the depravity and unbridled licence of a cult irrational and revolting as any practised by the primitive people of the dark ages(1). Yet another feature that was part and parcel of the Phoenician cult was the multitude of temple prostitutes, attempting attraction which deliberately fostered immorality among the masses(2). The follies of idolatry devoid of any decency of conduct and degrading in its manifestations, brought home to the Israelites the purity of their own form of worship, free from the trammels of vice and susperstition.

The religious cum political anarchy that prevailed in Israel (Samaria) from the very inception of the Northern Confederacy and later in Judah from the latter part of the reign of Joash, after the death of the high priest Jehodia, was in the main, the chief cause that brought about lapses in the correct observance in time and place, of the high festivals by the general body of the Israelites in both kingdoms. Of the five festivals to be observed as enjoined in the Pentateuch, two, namely the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) and the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) according to tradition, were not found among the ancient Beni-Israel. It is of interest to note in this connection that the Tabernacle festival was correctly observed for the first time in Palestine from the time of Joshua, by the erection of booths, after the return from the Babylonian captivity circa 537 B.C. (See Nehemiah VII.14.17). Rosh Hoshanna or the New Year was observed by the Beni-Israel for only one day instead of two as at present, whilst Kippur or the Day of Atonement was observed for two days, the first day as a fast and the second as a feast. Pesach or the Passover was also commemorated, the Beni-Israel abstain-

(1) Graetz (Rhine) Popular history of the Jews. Vol. I. p. 92.
(2) Graetz (Rhine) Popular history of the Jews. Vol. I. p. 130.

ing from eating leavened bread for the full eight days of the feast after first discarding leavened food from their homes. The Beni-Israel, however, are said to have been unaware of the religious significance of the festival. Here again history records that the festival was correctly observed in Judah for the first time since the death of the prophet Samuel in the reign of king Josiah circa 621 B.C. (1).

The many intermittent permeations of idolatrous practices, introduced in Samaria and later in Judah, appear to have made little or no headway among the common folk of the two kingdoms, the true religious line of conduct as exhorted by the prophets, counteracting any lasting change in religious worship. In the absence of a universal authoritative lead in religious observance lapses were inevitable. It thus came about that such festivals as were incapable of being observed in the correct manner in the home, were bypassed as exemplified in the case of the Beni-Israel. The home offerings in respect of vows were on the other hand more able to be fulfilled to an extent which left nothing to be desired. The hazard of the sea in ancient days and the uncivilised state of the peoples in the outlying foreign countries, made the pursuit of trade a dangerous calling. The long absences of husbands, brothers and sons brought woes more to the fore especially among the women of the two tribes, the seamen-cum-merchant tribes of Asher and Zebulum and to which the Beni-Israel housewife is still prone; their faith in the efficacy of these offerings from the heart, remains unshaken even at this day. This visible religious manifestation of the past among the Beni-Israel from time immemorial to the present entlightened age, clearly marks them out as direct descendants from the very ancient stock of the

(1) Graetz (Rhine) Popular history of the Jews. Vol. I. Chap. VII. p. 176. Chron. II-XXXV. 18.

mariner confraternity of Israel whose tribal enclaves were in the north. The tradition long standing, held by the Beni-Israel that their ancestor castaways on the Navgaon beach, were northerners—in the Marathi vernacular Uttar-ka-dil cha-pradesh cha tun—being proven as one of fact and not a myth as has been considered by many.

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PART II

CHAPTER FIVE

THE OPHIR OF THE BIBLE.

The geographical position of the "Ophir" referred to in the Bible is vaguely touched upon in many thesis on the subject. Two distinctive influences apparently were important considerations in resolving the issue. The first was the large quantity of gold brought to king Solomon from Ophir viz. 420 talents — vide I. Kings IX-27-28 or according to II. Chronicles VIII.18-450 talents. The second, the probable sea route that was followed by Solomon's fleet from its base at Elath to Ophir having regard to the fact that mariners of old were compelled to hug the coasts in making long sea voyages due to the lack of scientific navigational aids as now in use; when blown out to the open sea by adverse winds or storms, birds were made use of, which when released, flew landwards and guided them to pilot their vessels towards the adjacent shores(1).

In one year the Jewish king obtained 666 talents of gold in all. I.K.X.14-420 of which were from Ophir, 120 talents from the Queen of Sheba. I.K.X.2-10—and 126 talents from the kings and spice merchants of Arabia—I.K.X. 15. Ophir as the source of the gold that flowed into Palestine is mentioned in various places in the Bible E.G. Psalm XLV-9, Isaiah XIII-12, I.K.X.II, II Chron. VIII. 18 & LX-10. Job XXII. 24 & XXVIII-16. The fabulous wealth of king Solomon has invested Ophir with a halo of gold so much so that the phrase "gold of Ophir" finds expression even at the present day.

Graetz gives the location of Ophir as at the mouth of the Indus river, Sindh (India)(2). The long coast line

(1) See Chapter I.
(2) Graetz—Popular history of the Jews (Rhine) Vol. I. p. 78.

from Elath via the coasts of the Arabian peninsula and the Gulf of Oman and thence via the Southern sea-board of Persia and Makran (Baluchistan) thus accounted for the lengthy voyage of three years as given in the Bible. Both the Persian and Makran coasts were barren and inhospitable, sparsely inhabited and afforded no safe known haven large enough for the anchorage of a fleet of cargo ships of considerable size for replenishing their fresh water supply; the dread of scurvy also was a potent menace.

Historical research establishes the fact that commercial contacts between the Indus basin and the Euphrates valley existed in the 15th and 14th centuries B.C. (1). The Indus valley was part of the 27th satrapy of the dominions of the Persian king Darius (521-485 B.C.) and was famous for its gold obtained from the alluvial fields of Dardistan. Darius acquired the territory by conquest consequent on the story current in Babylon for centuries of the fabulous amount of gold available there comparable in volume to that obtained by the Jewish kings. The tribute levied by the Persian monarch was 360 talents annually. The gold fields which supplied the precious metal were in consequence, quickly exhausted (2). The flow of gold from Dardistan having ceased, Darius was apparently seized with the idea that the real Ophir was somewhere else. Skylax, a Greek mercenary, was thereupon sent by him on an exploratory quest. Skylax sailed along the coasts of Arabia to Arsinoe, the modern Suez, via Aden. He was thus supposed to have traversed the original route followed by the Jewish fleets from the mouth of the Indus to Elath. His mission was a failure. The true location of Ophir remained a mystery as it was asserted that Ophir pro-

(1) See chapter II.
(2) Rawlinson—Intercourse between India and the Western World pp. 18. 24 and 102.

bably was somewhere on the Gulf of Oman, where Indian and Phoenician merchants conducted trade, the gold exchanged being the product of the rich fields of Southern Arabia.

The Greek hegemony over Sind and a part of the Western Punjab, after the invasion of Alexander the Great, was in existence from 325 B.C. to about 70 years before the birth of Christ. The Indus Basin was at the time designated "SAUVIR" (Sanskrit) meaning the region of the Sindu Nadi (river) (1). The name Sind was applied to the region in the modern age derived from "Sindu". Similarly the name Indus for the river it may reasonably be deduced, was transmuted from Sindu, the "S" being transposed.

In the era 324 B.C. to 184 B.C. the Gupta Empire held sway from the Bay of Bengal in the east to the Arabian sea in the west and from the Hindu Kush mountains in the north to the Narbada river in the south. The efficient administration in the Gupta dominions brought in its train tranquility and prosperity. Trade was fostered. New roads were provided especially between important commercial centres and old ones put in a good state of repair. Dacoits and robbers were eliminated. The Indo-Greek frontier was made safe for an uninterrupted flow of merchandise. Ports were opened on the coasts of Kutch and Kathiawar to promote overseas commerce via the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf. The wealth that flowed into the country made it famous.

The trade contacts in the 15th and 14th centuries B. C. between the Indus Basin and the Euprathes valley were apparently via the ancient Port of Baruchacha, the modern Broach at the mouth of the Nar-

(1) Banerji—Prehistoric ancient and Hindu India. pp. 78-113.

bada river. The Central and north-west Indian territorial enclaves made use of this port for their overseas trade. Sailing ships in days of old hugged the coasts and were enabled in the open road-steads en route to take in and bring in cargo. Ancient Indian history makes no mention of any regular haven in the Indus estuary. Karachi was non-existent. It was founded by the British in modern times. In the Gupta period the open road-steads in its western dominions were converted into regular ports with facilities for loading and unloading cargo direct from the wharves. It may be added that some of these ancient ports have come into prominence in the modern age e.g. Cambay, Oka, Veraval and Porbunder, able to accommodate steamships of moderate tonnage.

Probably following the example of the Gupta administration, the Greeks converted the open road-stead at or near the mouth of the Indus into a regular port with amenities for loading and unloading cargo direct from ship to shore and vice versa. The designation "Sauvir" most likely may have been applied to the port. It may thus have come about that in the Greek translation of the Bible in the time of Potelmoy Philadelphus of Egypt-circa 285-246 B.C. that Sauvir was transliterated into "Sophir" in the Septuagint. The shortened form "Ophir" was a natural corollary in later ages. In the absence of factual evidence to support the concept herein it cannot be accepted historically. Further the products brought to King Solomon viz. peacocks, apes, ivory, are indigenous to Southern India and are not to be found either in Sind or its hinterland; the names given in the Bible for these products are either in Tamil derivatives or Sanskrit, Tamil being the vernacular, spoken and written, of Southern India generally.

It is abundantly evident from the observations foregoing that a haven clearly designated "Ophir" was non-

existent at or near the estuary of the Indus river in the times of King Solomon and the later kings of Judah and Israel.

The land of Punt (Somaliland) was another possible territory where Ophir was supposed to be situated. Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt, co-regent with Thotmes III, circa 1455-1435 B.C. has left a record on the walls of the temples erected at Dar-el-Bari near Thebes in honour of the god Amen, of the treasures brought by an expedition the Queen sent to the land of Punt; treasures of gold, ivory, precious woods, apes etc. As Solomon reigned circa 975-935 B.C. the Egyptian Queen obtained identical items as given in the Bible, five hundred years before, from a country not very far from Palestine. The Queen of Sheba in addition to gold presented King Solomon with a large quantity of spices. The land of Punt was contiguous to the dominions of the queen which were in the modern Abyssinia(1).

The fact that the name "Ophir" is not assigned to any known haven in any of the three territorial units mentioned indicates that its real location was somewhere else. The renewal of the trade contacts with Ophir by the later kings of Judah and Israel, one hundred and fifty years after Solomon's death, is a definitive assertion that Ophir was a famous emporium of trade for centuries on the coast of India well known to ancient marriners and merchants alike from the near and middle East countries, easily accessible via well known and well frequented sea lanes.

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(1) Hall—Ancient history of the Middle East pp. 289-290 & 517. Breasted—The Conquest of Civilization. p. 98. The datum 1500 to 1447 B.C. is here given for the reign of Thotmes III of Egypt.

Having regard to the scene of the wreck of the Beni-Israel first ancestors, about six miles to the south of Bombay, the factual inference that emerges is suggestive of the concept that the objective haven sought to be reached, could not but have been situated within a reasonably measurable compass of the Navgaon beach on the Konkan coast. Ancient Hindu, Jain and Buddhist literature, religious and secular, mention Surparaka situated on the estuary of the Vaitarna river, thirty miles north of Bombay, as a great mercantile emporium and entrepot for the Indian overseas trade in ancient days, Arabia and the Persian Gulf on the one side and the Southern Indian Peninsula, Ceylon, the Indian Archipelago, and Southern China on the other.

Surparaka from the Sanskrit Sur-God and Paraka-Ocean or God of the ocean, is variously pronounced, Surpara or Sopara in short being the name in common use at the present day by the inhabitants of the townlet now occupying part of the site of the ancient city. The shortened name as derived from the long line of the progenitors of the present inhabitants, bears a close resemblance to the Ophir of the Bible; the "S" in Sopara is either dropped or pronounced as 'H' by the residents local and near abouts. In the Septuagint (1) the name "Sophir" is used; Josephus, the Jewish historian likewise gives the designation as Sophir. In the later religious works of the Jains "Sopara" is variously written as "Soparaya", "Soparaka" and "Sopar"; the last name is pronounced "Opar", the "S" being silent; it is thus phonetically on the same plane as "Ophir" as written in the Hebrew Scriptures(2)(3).

(1) *Note*—The Septuagint is the Greek version of the old testament said to have been made about 270 B.C.
(2) Bombay Gazetteer—Vol. XIV. Thana p. 239.
(3) *Note*—The Vanias (Banias) or Indian traders of Ophir with Baveru are Jains by caste.

The present town of Sopara situated in Lat. 19°-2.5' N. and 72°-48' E is approximately 30 miles north of Bombay accessible from the "Nalla Sopara" (Small Sopara) station on the Western Railway. The antiquarian remains in the vicinity clearly indicate the existence of an extensive city and a great trade emporium and port in ancient days. It is described as a holy place in the Mahabarata (circa 1400 B.C.) and in the religious literature of the Hindus, Jains and Buddhists and therefore an important place of pilgrimage. Indian merchants in days of old, combined business with religious devotion and made pilgrimages to such sacred places with their families and retainers, taking up residence therein for many years until they acquired sufficient wealth to retire to their native place. It may be added that the Banias who are mentioned as the chief Indian traders with Baveru (Babylon), follow Jainism as their creed and the name and fame of Sopar pronounced Opar—"Ophir" without doubt, may be linked with the concept that the name "Ophir" as given in the Bible emanated originally as from the intimate contacts these traders maintained with Jewish merchants at Baveru and later at Ophir itself when Solomon's fleet first arrived at the port with merchandise from Palestine It is conceivable that Ophir or Ophar being the common cognomen in every day use, the Sanskrit name Surparaka remained generally in the background and finds no place in the Bible; this has undoubtedly been the unwitting means by which the exact location of the famous port known throughout the East, has eluded close enquiry in the past ages.

Surparaka was the capital of Aparanta or Konkana as otherwise called, comprising the Western coastal strip of India from the modern Navsari to Gokarna (between Karwar and Honavar) and formed part of the satrapy of Suvarnagiri (meaning golden hill) of the empire of

the great Asoka (269-232 B.C.), the Buddhist Emperor of India and the grandson of the famous Chandragupta Maurya. Asoka sent a Buddhist mission to Surparaka about the middle of the third century B.C. and of 70,000 hearers who were addressed, 1000 men and more than that number of women entered the Buddhist priesthood spreading the Buddhist doctrine in the Konkan. A fragment of the 8th edict of Asoka was found in Sopara in April 1882(1). It is asserted that the system of water supply prominent even at the present day, the remains of Buddhist shrines and other sacred edifices proves the existence of a large population(2).

The ancient overseas trade of India was mainly in rare and valuable merchandise in comparatively small bulk catering for the rich, such as kings and nobles and not for the general body of the proletariat as in modern times. Silk was sold for its weight in gold. The exports from India principally were textiles picturesquely described as made from the "wool" grown on trees, the fine muslins for which India was famous, metal-wares ivory, perfumes, dye-stuffs (indigo) and a large amount of spices. The imports consisted of minerals, of which there was a deficiency in India, such as brass, tin and lead, wines, horses etc. The entrepot trade consisted of silk and porcelain imported from China, in pearls from Ceylon, and precious stones from the Indian archipelago(3).

(1) *Note*—(a) The fragment contained six lines of the edict Bombay Gazeteer Vol. XIV. p. 339.
(b) The whole of the 9th edict was also found in Jan. 1956.

(2) (i) See article—Antiquarian remains at Sopara by the late Pandit Bhagwanlal Indraji in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Bombay Branch, Vol. XV. pp. 273 seq.
(ii) Imperial Gazetteer of India. Vol. 23 (1908) p. 87.

(3) (i) Jathar & Beri—Indian Economics. Vol. II (8th ed. 1949)
(ii) Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol. 23 (1908) p. 87.
(iii) *Note*—A description of the merchandise brought from Palestine and Tyre is given in Ezekiel chap. 26 & 27.

Surparaka (Sopara) occupied quite a central position in regard to both the inland trade routes and the Indian coastal traffic to maintain the role of a vital trade link with the overseas countries to the west, north and south of the sub-continent. It possessed large ship-building yards to the north at Agashe, 2½ miles away, which in addition carried on a flourishing trade in timber. It is asserted that the ships built at Agashe were in later times, as good as Portuguese ships able to make the voyage to Europe(1).

Merchandise from the interior of the country to the Sopara port, was transported via two ghats or passes which pierced the Sayadhari range of hills separating the Indian plateau known as the Deccan from the Konkan low-lands. The Thall Ghat via Igatpuri and Kasara, Igatpuri on the top of the plateau and Kasara below, carried the bulk of the inland trade goods from Central India, via Nasik and from the Deccan and the countries coterminous to the east and south thereof, to Bhiwandi or Kalyan, both inland ports served by navigable creeks and thence via the broad Ulhas river and the Bassein creek to the open sea to Sopara a short distance north-wards. The Bhore Ghat via Khandala and Khopoli provided entry into Panwell, also an inland port on a navigable creek and from thence via the Ulhas river via the same sea-lane to Sopara.

Merchandise from the peninsular ports south of Sopara, mainly from Cranganore at the mouth of the Periyar river on the Malabar coast entered via the Thana creek near Bombay into the Ulhas river and so to their destination. Broach, an ancient port at the mouth of the Narbada river—it was known as Bharuchakka—handled the sea-borne traffic in merchandise to Sopara which flowed from Malwa and Saurashtra (Gujerat).

(2) Bombay Gazetteer, Vol. XIV.

To traverse the ghats over which proper roads were not available, goods by carts or pack animals from the interior for transport to the coast had to be unloaded at a central rendezvous; when sufficient merchandise had accumulated, pack animals, mainly bullocks, were employed to convey the goods over the passes; each of the loads carried by pack animals had to be adjusted to such weights as could easily be carried over the steep inclines without mishap. The Ghats covered with dense forest, were the haunts of dacoits—robbers in gang formations—and armed escorts were indispensable. The journey of approximately 15 miles was made at night with hundreds of bullocks, torch bearers and armed guards, with long sharp spears. The bullock drivers, guards and torch bearers made an unearthly din, shouting at the top of their voices, to scare away wild animals and the dacoos (dacoits) who were forced to keep away from the beaten path as the dense undergrowth offered precarious hideouts where venomous snakes and fierce leopards lurked. It may be added that the ghats were impassable in the rainy season, the precipitation being over 300 inches on the average during the four monsoon months (June to September); women and children were conveyed in palanquins (litters) borne on the shoulders of from four to eight bearers, men and youths making the journey on tatoos (tats) or hardy mountain ponies. The Mahadeo Kolis(1), not to be confused with the Son Kolis who are fishermen by profession and who occupy villages on the coast, were the principal carriers over the Ghat routes.

From Bhiwandi, Kalyan and Panwell merchandise was carried to Sopara in machwas, sailing vessels of 16 to 25 tons capacity. The duration of three years as

(1) *Note*—The word coolie is derived from Koli.

given in the Bible for the voyages to Ophir from Elath and back is, from the facts herein cited, satisfactorily accounted for. The Jewish merchants at Sopara had necessarily to wait for sufficient cargoes to accumulate from the interior and the coastal ports to make up the full carrying capacity of their ships. Further, refitting, provisioning and watering the vessels for the return voyages had to be given sustained attention. Perhaps also a few vessels on the Indian model were added or replaced such ships as were unfit. It is possible that the duration of the later voyages were considerably reduced by leaving behind at Ophir Jewish trade factors to build up adequate stocks so as to effect a quicker turn round which would increase the profits of the enterprise. The presence of some such factors at Ophir and perhaps other personnel such as shipwrights was doubtless a potent reason for the first ancestors of the Beni-Israel arriving at the deliberate decision of bringing their families and effects to Ophir. They were thus sure of a warm welcome and an assurance of safety enabling them when an opportunity offered, to easily secure the means of returning to their own homeland as evidenced by the tradition still held by them as the descendants of the Israelites of the Northern Confederacy of Israel.

Evidence that the commodities brought to King Solomon were of Indian origin is afforded by the fact that the names given in the Bible for several are derived from the Sanskrit or the Tamil (Dravidian)(1). Vedic Sanskrit was the spoken and written languages of the better classes in the Konkan and the interior of the Indian peninsula, Tamil generally being the common

(1) *Note*—Indian seamen in ancient days were mostly of Dravidian origin. The numerous inland waterways in Southern India made Dravidian youths accustomed to skilfully handle water craft from a very early age and they made good sailors.

language of Malabar and to the south thereof. The domestic elephant ordinarily a beast of burden, caprisoned and bedecked on religious and ceremonial occasions, is called "Ibha"; the tusks are also called "Ibha". These huge pachyderms are found in considerable numbers in the forests of Kanara, Mysore and Travancore and when captured and tamed, are acquired by not only the rajas and nobility but by rich citizens and the maths or religious seminars, where religious instruction is imparted to Brahamin youths to fit them as priests, the maths being richly endowed. In the Hebrew text ivory is given as "Shen Hebbim" derived without doubt from the Sanskrit "Ibha Dana" (Dana is short for Danta = teeth) or elephant's teeth—Thukei used for peacock is apparently adapted from the Tamil "Tokai" or the bird with the splendid tail. The peafowl is plentiful on the wooded slopes of the western ghats touching cultivated fields where numbers of them come down to feed in the mornings and evenings. Ape in the Hebrew 'Kaph' is from the Sanskrit "Kapi". Almug or Algum in the Bible is manifestly from "Valguka", the Sanskrit for the sandalwood tree, valgu; taking the form "Algu", V being silent; corrupted forms are a common heritage during transliteration where different languages are spoken. The written word invariably differs from the spoken; the correct phonetic form thus undergoes a change due to lack of familiarity with words as spoken by the indigenous inhabitants.

Modern research establishes the fact that the Phoenicians were probably the first amongst the nations in ancient times to affront the dangers of the open seas, steering at night by the Polar Star, their ships, picturesquely described as ships of Tarshish in the Bible, being nothing more than large ships capable of undertaking

long voyages(1). They are also credited to have been the first amongst the mariners of old to have made charts of the seas they traversed, calculated distances and laid down the relative positions of the various havens they visited. Further they studied the occurrence of spring and neap tides and were aware of their connection with the position of the sun and moon relatively to the earth and were thus able to forecast the weather conditions(2).

Abundant evidence also exists to show that ancient Indian mariners were no whit behind the Phoenicians in the art of ship-building as well as the navigation of the open seas. They not only built ships larger than those of the Phoenicians, galleys with a hundred oars, but were experienced sailors undertaking voyages to distant lands(3). It is asserted that for full thirty centuries (4) India maintained sustained commercial contacts via established sea lanes with the Phoenicians, Hebrews, Assyrians, Greeks, Egyptians and Romans and acquired the proud position of the mistress of the Eastern seas, the early growth of her shipping and ship building, the genius and energy of her merchants and the skill and daring of her seamen enabling her to do so(5). That the Hindu mariners were one better than the Phoenicians in the intricacies of navigation, is evident from the fact recorded that early Indian astrologers used the magnet in the manner the campass is now used, to fix the position of the north and east, in laying foundations and other religious rites and which in the shape of an 'iron fish' floating in a vessel of oil, was in the opinion of experts, used as a marine compass for a correct

(1) Rawlinson (BNG) India and the Western World p. 10.
(2) Rawlinson (G) Phoenicia, pp. 39, 309 & 310.
(3) Rawlinson (N.G.) India and the Western World p. 10.
(4) Circa—1500 B.C. to about 1400 A.D.
(5) Mookerji—Indian shipping pp. 4, 5, 19 et seq.

course to be followed in navigating the open seas(1).

A well known aid to the navigation of the Arabian Sea by sailing vessels is the existence of the monsoon winds which blow regularly across the Indian Ocean. The steady south-west current during the Indian summer and monsoon period, enables comparatively safe and quick voyages to be made across the sea expanse between the south and east Arabian and Western Indian coasts and vice versa. A Greek, Hippalos by name, a pilot or merchant, who voyaged probably in an Indian ship made this astonishing discovery and was not slow to impart the knowledge he gained to those engaged in the Indian trade. That this means of navigation was known and made use of from very early times(2)—the word monsoon is derived from the Arabic "Mousim" meaning wet weather—is self evident; adaptations to the variable forces of natural phenomena over a long period of trial and error by navigators, could not but be attributed to the experience of the many spread over very many years having regard to the lack of scientific knowledge in the age herein. That Indian seamen followed by the Phoenicians and Hebrews and later by the Arabs and Greeks were the pioneers who discovered and profited by the means described which shortened the duration(3) of the voyages by boldly traversing open established sea-lanes, cannot be doubted. Graetz avers that Solomon's seamen—Israelites as well as Phoenician —were "most skilful sailors who knew the route thoroughly". This is fully borne out by the fact that the Beni-Israel ancestors must have unhesitatingly voyaged across the open sea between Arabia and Ophir, the

(1) Bombay Gazetteer. Vol. XIII. Part II. Appendix A.
(2) Padmanbha Menon—History of Kerala Vol. I. pp. 302 & 303.
(3) *Note*—Arab bagalas (sailing vessels of 20 to 25 tons) now a days take 25 to 30 days for the voyage from the Gulf of Aden to Bombay. The heavily laden ships of Tarshish of the Jewish Kings may be said to have taken 40 to 45 days from Socotia to Sopara provided the weather was favourable.

wreck of their ship or ships being a little over thirty miles south of Ophir. That they hugged the coasts and were blown south nearly 500 miles from about the Indus estuary is a proposition unsupported by facts and which can safely be discarded.

It may be added that the Konkan coast in the near vicinity of Navgaon and the north and south thereof, is subject to sudden squalls and that vessels should be blown far out of their course by the force of the winds which sometimes attain a velocity of from 50 to 60 miles an hour, is of frequent occurrence especially in the monsoons. A recent catastrophe was the tragic loss of the S.S. Ramdas a vessel of 900 tons burthen, which foundered six miles to the south of the Bombay port on the 17th July 1947 when no less than 700 passengers found a watery grave. The season was the mid-monsoon and the steamer left Bombay in weather considered safe for the voyage to the coastal port of Rewas at the entrance of the Dharanatar creek 4 miles due east. The most modern aids to navigation in this case proved of no avail in saving both the ship and the valuable lives that were lost.

The pre-Islamic Arabs were not a united nation and that they visited India's shores for the purposes of trade is nowhere specifically mentioned in history. King Solomon levied a tribute of 120 talents of gold annually from the Arab governors and spice merchants probably for affording safe conduct to the trade caravans traversing his dominions, which establishes the concept before adumbrated, that scattered Arab principalities mainly existed on the coastal Arabian belt, the peninsula inland being the haunt of Arab nomadic tribes. It is manifest that Indians in Indian ships traded with Arab merchants on the shores of Arabia itself. The exchange of merchandise appears to have been on a considerable

scale; where a gap in bartered commodities existed, it was covered apparently by gold payments, a common media employed all over the east to cover the deficiency unable to be made up by barter. India as the mistress of the Eastern seas for many centuries was thus plentifully supplied with gold from the countries which traded with her merchants. India's indigenous resources in respect of the yellow metal were probably also considerable. Alluvial gold was found in river estuaries, the detritus washed down from the hills containing gold deposits. Suvarnagiri the capital of Apparants (Konkana) was also probably a large source of supply. The name "golden hill" as derived from Suvarnagiri points to Maksi near Raichur as the probable site as ancient workings have been discovered near-by now known as the Hutti gold mines, wherefrom a fair amount of gold has been recovered by modern methods.

It is evident that the variety and quantity of merchandise brought to Ophir in the ships of the Jewish kings far exceeded the bartered goods exchanged at Ophir. The values reckoned compared with those obtaining for Indian commodities being higher. The extra coverage was made up by payments computed in gold talents(1) or in silver and precious stones thus accounting for the large amount of gold that flowed into Palestine.

A noticeable feature that may be said to obtrude is the apparent lack of enterprise shown by the survivors of the wreck at Navgaon to locate Ophir which was about 35 miles away on the same coast to the north thereof and which by name and repute if not by actual locality, was known to them. Navgaon is a tiny vil-

(1) *Note*—The talent known as the Attic, Euboic etc. varied in weight and value in Greece, Rome, Assyria etc.

lage in a part of the Konkan unfrequented by traders and the inhabitants ordinarily have rare contacts with the outside world. The Konkan areas were covered with dense forest in ancient days and few ventured far on account of the fear of robbers and the wild animals infesting the jungle; rare visits were made on special occasions by a few of the inhabitants to sacred shrines for the fulfilment of vows or seeking a boon, when villagers travelled in large companies fully armed. Enquiries were doubtless made by the Jewish castaways and perhaps led nowhere; persistence probably led to many dead ends and proved hopeless. Communications in the modern sense did not exist. Even today with a fairly large population, the conception of time and space amongst the simple country folk are vague in the extreme an educated person is rarely met with —A "Hank" or a loud shout that can be heard at a distance is used to indicate half a mile or thereabouts; a "dhawa", the distance a man can run without stopping to take breath, is still less capable of exact measurement(1). In these circumstances, with all the will in the world the efforts of the survivors from the wreck, handicapped as they were by a lack of knowledge of the local spoken vernacular, may be assumed to have been of no avail and they perforce submitted to the inevitable and accommodated themselves to their new environment as best they could.

With the conquest of the Western coastal territories of India by the Muslims new major ports came into existence such as Cambay, Broach, Surat, Janjira, Chaul (Revdanda), Goa, Dabul and Calicut. Direct contact was made with Arabia, Egypt and the Persian Gulf for trade and for the Haj to Mecca. Sopara gradually de-

(1) Kyd Nairne—The Konkan p. 158.

clined as a port due to this impact and ceased about 1400 A.D. as the main centre for the entrepot trade of Peninsular India. In modern times Bombay has replaced Sopara. The inland railway system has increased the volume of merchandise handled at the port to vast dimensions, the coastal services contributing a fairly large quota to the volume of the trade goods dealt with. The railway (now electrified) it may be added, traverses the parallel land routes over the Sayadhari Range followed in ancient days by pack bullocks for the conveyance of the merchandise to and from Ophir, several long railway tunnels piercing the mountains in both the "Thull and Bhore Ghats".

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PART III

EARLY HISTORY

CHAPTER ONE

BASIS OF APPROACH

That the gradual growth of seven pairs of human beings who now comprise 20,000 souls, after twenty-five centuries on Indian soil, is able at this date to afford sufficient material for a history, may at first sight appear somewhat an imponderable undertaking. When, however, account is taken of the fact that this small Jewish entity has achieved a status in the social and material spheres by its own efforts, which compares very favourably with the more advanced communities of other faiths in whose midst they live, it surely gives pause to any such outright view being arbitrarily entertained. Inevitably the fortunes of the Beni-Israel in the very early periods of their history, were in no way vastly different from those of their near neighbours in the villages in the Bombay Konkan in which they founded their homes. That they branched out on a line of their own is equally evident from the social status they enjoy at the present day. Their progressive attainments in the field of human endeavour can only be gauged by delving into some chapters of ancient forgotten history of that portion of the country in which their many generations passed their lives and where not a few still elect to follow in the footsteps of their forefathers.

An incursion as herein indicated, especially from the political aspects in respect of which factual material is available from various sources to a more or less considerable extent, would doubtless present a picture delineating their progression in the social and economic spheres from the earliest times and possibly also afford in however small a measure, incidental side lights on the forces albeit unseen, which operated thereanent.

Historical material giving vivid descriptions of the conditions of the life of the people of the Bombay Konkan in the past ages is woefully lacking. The Bombay Government Gazetteers contain brief accounts in general terms. The Beni-Israel themselves have no record of the doings of their ancestors. They do not appear to have maintained any. In the beginning of the 19th century when education found a place in their lives, written material in respect of their social and religious advance in the Marathi vernacular mostly, first made its appearance. Traditional tales and modes of living as derived from their ancestors and still followed specially in the Konkanpatti, are useful guides in filling up many a gap. It may be emphasised that the Bombay Konkan region is still in a very backward state, the amenities which contribute to the civilising influences of mankind in the present age, being negligible in extent; the great majority of the population is still illiterate. There are no railways. Some of the old highways have in recent years, been considerably improved to take motor traffic. Modern industry has yet to make its appearance. Primitive modes of life and methods of agriculture reminiscent of a past age and the concomitants thereanent are still largely conspicuous. The poverty of the masses is a byword; the many are content to jog along on one full meal a day. The present is thus more or less a true reflection of the past and a fairly cohesive account is still able to be delineated of the lives of the Beni-Israel in the past ages.

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PART III

CHAPTER TWO

NAVGAON & AFTER

The two main tumuli at Navgaon—the one to the north said to be of males and that to the south of females(1) may be said to contain the remains of 14 to 16 adults in each having regard to the contours of the mounds as now represented by the boundary stones placed around them. The five smaller mounds, traces of which have now disappeared, probably contained the bodies of those drowned and which were later washed ashore, and were interred as found. The total refugees at a fair computation did not thus exceed 50 adults in all and this number may be said to have been the company that originally set sail from Elath for India's shores. The fact that all the bodies washed ashore were buried together in seven common graves, strongly supports what may be said to be a reasonable inferential fact, that the deceased as well as the survivors were of the one and same faith. The inevitable conclusion that emerges would be that the vessel or vessels in which they sailed from Elath either belonged to them or were under their sole control for purposes of their own choosing. The assumption therefore is warranted that those burdened with families alone elected to leave Elath for India's shores, such as were not, risking the hazard or having already risked the hazard, of making their way as best they could into their own or such other tribal enclaves as were still unaffected by the Assyrian invasion.

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(1) Gazetteer—Colaba and Janjira Vol. XI. p. 237.
Note—(i) The two tumuli herein are on the fringe of the sea shore. Due to erosion they are sometimes washed by the incoming tide especially in the monsoon period (June to September).
Note—(ii) Navgaon means new Village.

That there were more than one or at the most two ships which sailed from Elath, is discounted by the fact of the total number of bodies found and the fourteen people who survived. The presence of Jewish trade factors resident at Ophir and other odd personnel such as shipwrights was perhaps a strong "raison d'etre" for the refugees to elect to proceed to that haven where they would be welcome and lead peaceful lives.

It speaks volumes in favour of the tolerance of the Hindus that sympathising with the sad plight of the castaways on their shores, they offered them such hospitality as they could and gave them an occupation as oil pressers at Navgaon. The Konkanpatti is famous for the cultivation of the "Til"—Guizotia Oleifera—the golden blossoms of which may be seen far up the surrounding hill sides where it is extensively grown. From the "til" seed the oil is extracted in primitive oil presses. Cocoanut oil production is also a cottage industry largely followed in the Bombay Konkan, the copra or dried cocoanut kernels, largely imported, being first cut into small pieces and then fed into the oil press as it works. These primitive oil presses — even now in extensive use—are made from selected wood, usually the trunk of a large tamarind tree, six feet in height with a diameter of 3½ to 4 feet. A bowl to a depth of 4 to 4½ feet is hollowed out with a rim 3 to 4 inches wide on the top-most edge, the sides of the bowl gradually increasing to 6 inches, a foot to a foot and a half at the bottom of the hollowed trunk, a groove 3 to 4 inches wide is chipped out right round the trunk which is then sunk in the ground and well rammed, leaving the groove about 3 or 4 inches above ground level. A wooden pole from a straight branch or trunk of the Ain tree (TERMINALIA. TOMENTOSA) with the outer bark and soft wood removed, exposing the hard inner core,

about 6½ to 7 feet long and 3 to 4 inches in thickness and rounded in shape, acts as the pressing agent for the contents of the oil press. The pole turns round and round when it works, a slightly slanting position being secured by two flat pieces of stout timber one being shaped in the form of a half arc at one end which weighted with heavy stones, slides along the groove in the waist, and the other projecting from the top of the pole, both planks being joined by a long light vertical piece of timber. The contents of the bowl are thus able to be pressed when the contraption is worked round and round by a single bullock harnessed to the weighted projecting plank near the ground level. The person, usually a lad or a maiden in their teens, operating the press, sits on the rim and ducks his (her) head when the pole is near him; he not only adjusts the contents of the bowl and feeds the press, but arranges for the free flow of oil through four or five orifices provided at the sides, a foot or so above ground level, and fitted with hollow reeds let into them, the oil being collected in broad mouthed jars or other metal vessels. The eyes of the bullock are completely covered with leather hoods fastened with thongs round the head below the horns.

Both "til" and "cocoanut" oils find a ready market in the Konkan, the surplus being exported to the Deccan. The residue in the form of til or cocoanut oil cake, is used for feeding cattle and as manure. A certain agreed portion of the oil and oil cake is retained by the pressers as remuneration, a portion of which they sell or exchange (barter) for other commodities such as rice, pulse, salt etc. Oil pressing was in ancient times and is even today, a flourishing industry in Palestine. In I. Kings V-II—it is recorded that King Solomon gave Hiram, King of Tyre—twenty thousand measures of wheat for his household and twenty measures

of oil; again in II Chronicles II-10 and 15, for the servants of Hiram, who were employed as artisans for building the Temple at Jerusalem, the hewers of wood that cut timber, twenty thousand measures of beaten wheat and twenty thousand baths of wine and twenty thousand baths of oil. Rawlinson records that the highlands of Samaria and Judah produced wine and oil far beyond the wants of the inhabitants(1). The means of earning an honest livlihood in the Konkan was thus not lacking to the castaways at Navgaon as they were in all probability not unacquainted with the oil industry in their own land and took readily to the avocation in preference to any other that may have been offered to them by the villagers. That they chose an industry which was in a flourishing state in Palestine is a strong link in a chain confirming the tradition held by their descendants even today, that their ancestors belonged to the Northern Confederacy of Israel.

A progressive advance in their domestic economy assured by the paying industry which they chose to follow as oil pressers, led, as their numbers increased, to migrations to villages nearby and the entry into the agricultural field where the gains were considerable. In ancient days in the Konkan, land for houses for residential purposes in villages was allotted free, all inhabitants contributing such material as they could and assisting in building the substantial hutments intended for the owners. Likewise waste lands were also acquired free for cultivation, one's own people and others, assisting new comers in clearing and putting them in order. Rice being the principal crop grown in the Konkan much work in bunding the fields was required to allow rain water to collect and not drain off as rice requires plenty of water to grow. The only obligation that a

(1) Rawlinson (G) Phoenicia p. 95.

cultivator incurred was in respect of payment of revenues to the village headman or patil, who was responsible to the petty rajas or poligars as they were called, under whose remote patriarchal sway much of the country-side was subject.

The Bombay Konkan region where the Beni-Israel first set foot, was in ancient days more in the nature of a forest where man and beast held equal sway(1). There were no great cities nor was there much wealth to attract greedy monarchs to acquire the territory by conquest. For many centuries therefore the Beni-Israel ancestors perforce lived a humdrum life, unmolested in more or less obscurity. Several generations must have passed away before there was any appreciable increase in their numbers to be collectively designated as a community. They were scattered in various contiguous villages, where they eked out a modest living. They could not have been conspicuous in the country-side as they erected no temples nor did they possess any religious institutions such as Hindu Bhajanalias where religious discourses were held and which could possibly draw pointed attention to them as non-Hindus. The sobriquet "Shanwar Telis" by which they came to be known, was on the other hand, a distinctive appellation as there were several other entities who abstained from work on various days of the week such as the "Somwar Telis" who abstained from work on Mondays, the Kasars or metal workers and makers of utensils, the Sonars or goldsmiths and jewellers, abstaining also from doing work on one day of each week according to immemorial custom. Many Hindus instal their gods in the form of

(1) Kyd Nairne—The Konkan p. 3.

images in their homes (2) and worship them by performing pujas or religious ceremonies in privacy, family members taking such part as enjoined by caste rules as the head of the family may solely direct. The Beni-Israel shut themselves up in their houses and repeated according to tradition, the "Kiryat Shema" on the eve of and on all Sabbaths and such festivals as they were wont to observe as described in detail elsewhere. Their daily avocations were thus on the lines of their neighbours; in religious matters they differed but were considered by the general body of the inhabitants as on the same plane as themselves distinctive caste entities following their own ancestral modes of worship and as such tolerating and refraining from meddling with the usages of their neighbours in the religious sphere inculcated in them by their forefathers.

(2) *Note*.—In Vedantic Philosophy one Supreme Being who rules the world, is described as "God is One, many in One" that is having many attributes. Hence several minor gods in the shape of images e.g. God of rain, Indra, of wisdom, Ganesha, and so on.

PART III

CHAPTER THREE

THE BENI-ISRAEL IN ANCIENT TIMES

The Bombay Konkan separated as it is from the Deccan by the Sayadhari Hills to the East and bounded by the Arabian sea on the West, may be said to be a distinct geographical unit of territory; it however, possesses no connected history having always been divided into small principalities under local chiefs nominally owing allegiance to kingdoms in the interior. Except for fragmentary matter, no account of the condition of the people, their occupations, and the general state of the country-side for the very early periods exists(1). The great Hindu epics are also silent in regard to this particular region of the Indian sub-continent. India in the past ages, was not united under one paramount power and except for Northern India where powerful kingdoms flourished, the ancient history of many parts of India is mostly obscure and chronologically, a hopeless tangle.

Under the Great Asoka, the Buddhist Emperor of India 272 to 232 B.C. — a united Indian commonwealth extending south to the latitude from above Mangalore on the west coast to Madras in the east, was in existence, and the Bombay Konkan was included in the kingdom, being part of the viceregal enclave of Suvarnagiri. The site of Suvarnagiri has not yet been clearly identified. The name, translated, means "Golden Town" and it is conjectured that Maksi, in the Raichur District of the then Nizam's Dominions near which are old gold workings was the site of the city, as an Asoka inscription was discovered there in 1915 A.D.

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(1) Bombay Gazetteer—Vol. I. Part II. 1896, page 13.

As from the datum of the accession of Ahaz to the throne of Judah in 734 B.C. at about which period the Beni-Israel ancestors left the shores of Palestine, to the accession of Asoka to the throne of the Mauryas, the Beni-Israel had been resident in the Konkan villages for approximately 500 years. The progeny of seven pairs of human beings during about sixteen generations comprising the period, may, at a conservative estimate fairly be computed at two thousand souls or at an average of six to seven persons to a family, three hundred families, scattered probably in twenty or more contiguous villages. This small community was not conspicuous enough to attract the pointed attention of the rulers and was no doubt considered after the lapse of five centuries amongst the Hindus, as a distinct caste and no more, resident in the villages with other castes.

History records that when Gautama Buddha died about 543 B.C., Buddhism was merely a sect of Hinduism unknown beyond very restricted limits. Asoka first embraced Buddhism as a lay brother and by his piety and comprehensive and well planned measures of evangelization, succeeded in transforming the doctrine of the local Indian sect into one of the greatest religions of the world. Asoka however did not adopt Buddhism as the religion of the state. On the contrary not only was no attempt made to destroy Brahaminical Hinduism or Jainism, but a special edict (No. xi of the Rock series) was devoted to the exposition of tolerance being shown for and sympathy with, the religious beliefs and practices of others. All subjects of the king were warned to abstain from speaking adversely of their neighbours' faith, remembering that all forms of religion alike aimed at the attainment of self control and purity of mind of

the individual and were thus in agreement in respect of essentials however much they differed in externals(1).

After the disruption of the Mauryan empire about 185 B.C., the kingdom of the Satavhanas held sway over western India, the Konkanpatti being part thereof in or about the first century B.C. until 220 A.D. The region south of the Vaitarana river was, during the period, peaceful and flourishing. The ancient trade with the Persian Gulf was augmented by direct trade between Egypt and the port of Sigerus (Janjira). The latter was maintained until the second half of the first century A.D. when the value of the pepper trade diverted it to Malabar. The commerce via the Persian Gulf however was steadily maintained via Sopara (Ophir). The Satavhanas it is stated, probably appointed governors to the larger coast towns for fostering the overseas commerce.

History is silent in respect of the sovereignty over the Konkan in the 4th and 5th centuries A.D. At about the close of the latter, princes of the Maurya family(2) were overlords of the western coast until 610 A.D. when the Chalukyas with hundreds of ships captured the Mauryan capital of Puri, probably the modern Thana. By 757 A.D. the Rashtrakutas who had established themselves in the Deccan, extended their sovereignty over the Konkan. The southern branch of this dynasty known as the Silharas, settled in the south Konkan about 782 A.D. and ruled the country until 1008 A.D. after the fall of the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan. The northern branch however maintained their sovereignty over the Bombay Konkan from 810 to 1200 A.D. adding the coastal regions south of Chaul (Revdanda), to their

(1) Vincent Smith—Ancient History of India, pp. 187-197.
(2) Their descendants at this day are represented by the More clan of the Marathas—Gazetteer Bombay City & Island—Vol. II. p. 8.

dominions from the southern branch about 1010 A.D. This branch of the Silharas lost the kingdom in 1265 A.D. to the king of Deogiri—Mahadev, who wrested it from the last king of the Silharas named Someshwar(1).

During the period of the rule of the Silharas trade flourished with the Muslim countries overseas to the west of India. Muslim merchants were permitted to build mosques at Sindan (Sanjan) where the Parsis first sought a refuge in India (775 A.D.), and at Saimur (Chaul-Revdanda), a large and well built city with a population of 10,000 Muslims whose disputes were settled by a Muslim judge. Besides the Hindus and Muslims, Jews, Christians and Parsis were also settled in the City, Jewish synagogues(2), Christian churches and Parsee Fire Temples being in existence(3). The Jews most probably were merchants and visitors from overseas Moslem countries and even beyond, who came to Chaul for the purposes of trade. Alexandria was the venue for the exchange of goods between the countries bordering the Mediterranean basin and the countries to

(1) The Maratha clan, the Selars, are stated to be descendants of the Silharas. Gazetteer, Bombay City and Island part III page 9. *Note*: Deogiri was in after years known as Daulatabad near Nasik.

(2) Probably prayer halls.

(3) The reference to Muslims in Saimur (Chaul) is from AL. Masudi II 85 as quoted in the Gazetteer, Bombay City and Island Vol. II. p. 12. That to Jews, Parsees etc., is from AL KAZWINI the Arab historian, quoted in Elliots history of India I. 97 and repeated in the Gazetteer noted ante. Though AL KAZWINI wrote in the 13th century A.D. the information is derived from Misaar, Bin. Mulhalhil who visited India about 942 A.D. See Elliots history of India I. 94 and Gazetteer. Bombay Presidency Vol. I. Part I. p. 516. It is probably from Misaar Bin Mulhalhil's account of his travels or from the Jews who returned to Egypt (Alexandria) from Chaul, that Moses Maimonides derived his information about the Beni-Israel connotation in respect of which is made in the text following. Access to Masudi & Kazwinis works is not available in the the various libraries in Bombay.

the east to which access could be had via the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea. The Jews for long had been established traders at Alexandria. Much interest attaches to this fragment of ancient Indian history in as much as the existence of the Beni-Israel in the Konkan appears to have become known to Jewry in the near East and beyond. Moses Maimonides, the great medeival Jewish philosopher (1135-1204 A.D.) refers in his letter to the learned Jews of Lunel(1) in the 12th century A.D., "to the Jews of India who have nothing of religion except that they rest on the Sabbath and perform circumcision on the eighth day". The "Jewish Chronicle" in commenting on this letter, remarked that as Benjamin Ben Jonah of Tudela(1) who travelled in the 13th century, speaks of the Jews of the Malabar coast as knowing the law of Moses and the prophets and to a certain extent the Talmud and Halacha, the Jews referred to in Maimonides letter less than a century earlier, were the Beni-Israel(1). The inference follows that the Jews who used the synagogues in Chaul contacted the Beni-Israel resident in or in the environs of the city, as Chaul is is only 9 miles distant from Alibag, to the south thereof. That the Beni-Israel were resident there is manifest as the family surname Cheulkar is still prevalent amongst them(2). Chaul is now known as Revdanda. A Beni-

(1) (a) Graetz—Vol. III. 233-234-239-289-290 fance a there in sonthern Fance bad 300 Jewiwsh families & had a Talmudic accordingly.
(b) Graetz—Vol. III. p. 255.
(c) Jewish Chronicle—London 28-9-1906.

(2) *Note* (i) About the middle of the 19th of century following the custom of the Hindus the Beni-Israel adopted as surnames the name of the village in which they had founded homes and possessed houses and fields which they cultivated. Such surnames connoted the special rights and privileges enjoyed by the family in the village. See Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol. IV. p. 310.
(ii) In his historical monograph on Chaul, Dr. Gerson De Cunha assents that the Beni-Israel were residents of Chaul and its vicinity from time immemorial p. 74.

Israel synagogue exists there and there are several Beni-Israel families resident in Revdanda itself and the villages in the environs. The facts herein clearly indicate that the information about the existence of Jews in the Konkan and Malabar coasts induced a few from Egypt and elsewhere to undertake the journey to India to find out actual facts for themselves, such as Benjamin of Tudela and later the Jews long established on the Malabar coast who also were unaware of the existence of the Beni-Israel.

From the time of Asoka, a religious conflict for supremacy was waged between Brahaminism and Buddhism in the Konkan in general. The Buddhistic caves at Kanheri in Salsette(1) have their Brahamin counterparts in the caves at Mandapeshwar and Magasthan, also in Salsette. Probably these, it is asserted, symbolised Brahaminical supremacy after the overthrow of Buddhism in Western India, the Brahamins taking a pride in attempting to rival the works of their predecessors, or to the fact that in the early years of the Christian era the Brahamins and Buddhists lived at peace with one another and were equally favoured and protected by the reigning sovereigns(2). Salsette and parts of the Konkan were undoubtedly strongholds of Buddhism. Buddhist caves exist at Hinglaj near Chaul, at Pale, 2 miles N.W. of Mahad, Kuda, 13 miles N. of Mangaon and other places(3). Brahaminism however ultimately triumphed and the religio-social caste system of Brahaminical Hindu origin gained a firm foothold throughout India; it exists in its pristine form today.

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(1) *Note*—Easy access from Bombay to the caves can be had from the Borivli Station on the Western Railway suburban line.

(2) Kyd Nairne—The Konkan p. 17.

(3) Bombay Gazetteer Colaba & Janjira pp. 299-302-316 & 344.

It may be added that caste in India existed before 300 B.C. the most obvious features of the institution having been noticed by Greek authors of ascertained date; further it is adumbrated that castes, separated from one another by rules of ceremonial purity, as they now are, were in existence at least six or seven centuries earlier. Caste has withstood any disruption that occurred during the Mahomedan and European occupations of the country and continues to function in its original form as from time immemorial(1).

It may reasonably be assumed in view of the foregoing citations, that the conflict for centuries between two great rival religious systems enabled such faiths as that of the small and scattered community of the Beni-Israel to remain outside the pale of the controversy and assisted, rather than hindered, the Beni-Israel in scrupulously following the ancient creed of Israel unmolested. The tolerance of the great majority of the Hindus has made for the small community of Beni-Israel living in their midst for many centuries practising their religion in accordance with their particular usages.

The brief historical facts quoted above embrace a period from the time the Beni-Israel first landed on the Konkan soil to the early middle ages in respect of which additional factual material, to a greater extent, is lacking. Living in isolation for many centuries in a region politically unimportant, the Beni-Israel nevertheless may be said to have lived peaceful lives in the midst of the Hindus and in a tolerably contented condition, freely adhering to the ancient creed of their fathers and without molestation from their neighbours whose lives also were on a plane similar in all respects to their own.

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(1) Vincent Smith—Oxford history of India p. 37.

PART III

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BENI-ISRAEL IN THE SOUTHERN KONKAN.

The Beni-Israel appear to have penetrated the southern Konkan regions to the borders of the Savitri River at a very early period in their history. This enclave forms part of the coastal strip south of Alibag, rich in garden lands and over which Muslims, Abyssinians, Marathas and lastly the English, held sway. Dr. Gerson de Cunha in his historical monograph on Chaul (Revdanda) avers that the Beni-Israel were inhabitants of Chaul (and its environs) from time immemorial(1). Shrivardhan and Bankot were probably the farthest limits of the Beni-Israel migrations to the south; the surname Shrivardhankar is still to be found amongst the Beni-Israel derived from ancient family associations with the town, while Bankot was the recruiting centre for the British Bombay Native Army in which the Beni-Israel enlisted in large numbers.

The Muslim penetration into the Bombay Konkan regions dates from 1312 A.D.(2) when one Malik Kapur in the reign of Alauddin of the Khijli Dynasty, led an expedition into the Deccan and penetrated Maharashtra, laying waste the countryside and plundering the inhabitants from Dabul and Chaul on the coast to Raichur and Modkal in the interior(3). The Malabar coast was also overrun and similarly ravaged and subjugated to some extent; Muslim governors styled subedars, were appointed, the Konkan enclave being under the Dabul Subedari.

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(1) Dr. Gerson da Cunha—Notes on the history and antiquities of Cheul p. 74.

(2) The chronology is far from settled as 1311 A.D. is also given. See V. Smith Oxford history of India p. 232.

(3) The term Maharashtra connotes the Deccan and the Konkan together as one unit of territory.

In 1336 A.D. the Rayas founded the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar(1) and by 1346 A.D. had become powerful enough to check the Mahomedan inroads to the south and west thereof. The Konkan regions were at the period herein, under petty chieftains styling themselves Rajas or Poligars, Kolis in the north and Marathas in the south(2). These exercised sovereignty similar to the English barons in the middle ages and had no particular loyalties but were subservient nominally as suited them to the Muslim conquerors or to Vijayanagar.

In 1347 A.D. one Zafarkhan also called Hassan, a Turki or Afghan officer at the court of the Sultan of Delhi, Mahomed Bin Taglak, proclaimed his independence and occupied Daulatabad near Nasik. His conquests by 1358 A.D., when he died, extended to the coastal belt of the Konkan washed by the Arabian Sea. Goa and Dabhol also known as Dabul, the Muslim Mustaphabad, thence forward became the principal ports for the Deccan-Konkan trade. For a little more than 170 years the dynasty founded by Zafar Khan known as Bahaman, held sway over the Bombay Konkan. The wars waged by the Bahamani kings in the Deccan and the Konkan to consolidate their position resulted in the devastation of the petty Hindu principalites, villages being looted and burnt and the inhabitants ill-treated and even killed if they offered resistence(3). As a counter measure to protect themselves, villagers warned by refugees who came in their midst, abandoned their homes and took to the nearest jungles taking their families with them and

(1) The ruins of Vijayanagar on the banks of the Tunga-Bahdra river near the valley of Hampi are accessible from Hospet station on the Southern Railway on the arterial line from Hubli to Bellary.

(2) Kyd Nairne—The Konkan. p. 25.

(3) Vincent Smith—Oxford History of India, pp. 275, 283, 286 & 287.

as much portable property and cattle as they could. Huts were built and jungle lands were cleared and cultivated, the villagers remaining in their hide-outs for months and even years, until their safety was assured. The Muslim armies having a roving commission, lived on the country until re-called or forced to leave for lack of supplies. The evil herein, it is stated, was made still worse by the bands of irregulars that followed in the wake of the armies as they took the leavings and burnt what they could not carry away. Many of these fell into the hands of the villagers and were taught such a lesson that they eventually melted away. It will be seen that life and property were unsafe in the regions where the Beni-Israel had their habitations. They were subject to the same hardships as their neighbours and cannot be said to have led peaceful lives. The Subedar or governor in far Dabul, afforded no protection whatever. The general principles of the Muslim governments at the period comprised the occupation of the principal cities by force, terrorising the population in the country-side by every now and then sending expeditions into the interior, forced conversions to the Muslim faith and the levy of tribute by compulsion. These measures proving too harsh, were later modified to a small extent, revenue farmers, especially large landowners, being appointed to collect the revenue, non-compliance with the heavy exactions imposed, entailing forfeiture of the lands of the revenue farmers as well as of the other defaulters, mostly petty cultivators. As Hindu nobles gained favour at the Muslim courts, lands were allotted in fief or jagir in respect of which they were required to furnish companies of armed men to fight in the wars of their overlords. Peaceful avocations were thus gradually able to be followed by the conquered and prosperity to a more or less degree raised its head among the people.

The Beni-Israel at the period of the suzerainty of the Bahamani kings apparently migrated in greater numbers south-wards of Navgaon, the north Bombay Konkan being in the grip of constant warfare in the Muslims endeavouring to secure the trade monopoly at the two important ports of Thana and Kalyan, the name of the latter of which was Nawanagar converted later into the Muslim Islamabad. Frequent expeditions into the interior in the northern enclaves by the Muslim forces brought misery to the inhabitants in its train and emigration was the only remedy. The south Bombay Konkan coastal regions were intersected by numerous creeks running inland and afforded a means of escape to the people by means of boats, organized water transport for the Muslim forces being non-existent. Thus the Beni-Israel are found to be more numerous in the Habsan or the Janjira enclave at about the period of the Abyssinian penetration into this part of the country. Tradition asserts that the Beni-Israel were always well treated by the Hubshee. It may be added that the Abyssinian principality came gradually into existence from the year 1490 A.D.

The Bahamani kingdom was extinguished in 1518 A.D. when the five satrapies of which it was composed, revolted and proclaimed their independence and formed five separate Muslim kingdoms. Of these the sultanates of the Nizam Shahi dynasty of Ahmednagar and the Adil Shahi of Bijapur, held sway over the Bombay Konkan regions, the former roughly from Bassein to the north of Bombay in Salsette, to a little south of Janjira and the latter the strip from Janjira as far south as Goa, the Savatri river forming the boundary between the two. A distinctive phase in the lives of the Beni-Israel may be said to have been brought into being in the era pertaining to the ascendency of Ahmednagar and which accordingly is dealt with in the next chapter.

PART III

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BENI-ISRAEL IN HABSAN.

Habsan, the territorial principality of the Nawab of Janjira(1) to the south of the Kolaba District of the Maharashtra State (old Bombay Presidency) contains a fairly large number of Beni-Israel, the census of 1881 registering 590 men and women and that of 1941, 564 of which 252 were males and 312 females. The Beni-Israel are stated to have been much more numerous in this part of the country in the eighteenth century when the Siddi was powerful and Danda-Rajpuri was a place of trade. In Panchaitan or Diva Borlai alone there are said to have been one hundred and twenty-five families of the Beni-Israel. During the wars with the Marathas in the latter part of the 18th century many families are said to have gone to Alibag (Kolaba) and Bombay. At the present day Murud is the capital of the principality with a population of 8436 (census 1941). The territorial enclave as a whole is designated "Habsan" and the Abyssinians are known as the "Hubshees" or "Habshees" from the Arabic "El Habish" or the people of north-east Africa. They are also called "Siddis" derived from Syed, usually a term of respect amongst Muslims(2).

The rise of the Siddis of Janjira as a maritime power on the Bombay coast is an interesting chapter of Indian History. The Bahamani kings had established overseas trade contacts with the Egyptians, Turks, Abyssinians, Arabs and Persians, the principal ports in their territories being Chaul (Revdanda) Dabhol or Da-

(1) *Note*—Janjira is 44 miles to the south of Bombay.

(2) (i) Bombay Gazetteer. Vol. xi. Kolaba & Janjira pp. 12-133.
(ii) *Note*—Panchaitan Borlai is also known as Diva Borlai and is situated to the south of Janjira—Mandla Borlai is to the north of Janjira.

bul the Muslim Mustafabad, and Goa. In consequence there was a steady infiltration of Muslims from overseas countries who found their way to the Indian Muslim Courts and were employed as mercenaries in the army and in the states' other services, where many attained high rank by the influence they gained over the rulers for distinguished conduct. When Malik Kapur was appointed Governor of the Daulatabad and Junneri provinces one of his first objective was the reduction of the Janjira citadel which protected the approaches to the two towns of Danda and Rajpuri, the former situated about 2 miles to the south-east of Janjira and the latter a third of a mile to the east and from which an active trade was carried on in rivalry with Chaul, the Rajpuri Mahasala creek affording a safe anchorage to merchantmen. While thus engaged his father Nizam-ul-Mulk attached to the court, was assassinated, whereupon he threw off his allegiance and declared his independence, making Ahmednagar his capital. In 1490 A.D. his forces captured both Danda and Rajpuri. Two Abyssinians were thereafter appointed as captains in charge of the Janjira fortress and the conquered territory, Janjira being a rocky island commanding the entrance to the creek(1).

It was thus that the Beni-Israel first came in direct contact with the Abyssinian ruling powers. The appellative "Israel" which designation they always used in describing themselves, the fact that their male infants were circumcised when eight days old, that they buried their dead, that they did not worship images and that their religious devotions were addressed to a Holy God manifestly the same to whom the Muslims themselves paid reverent homage, made ultimately to the Israelis being identified as the "Banu-Israel" mentioned in the

(1) Bombay Gazetteer—Vol. XI—Kolaba & Janjira p. 434.
Note—The Rajpuri—Mahasha creek winds inland to a considerable depth with a breadth of one to three miles.

Holy Quaran. This appellative viz. Banu-Israel or Beni-Israel, has thus come to be increasingly applied to them to this day. Tradition asserts that the Beni-Israel were happy and contented in the Hubshee's territories and that their religious observances were never interfered with. They however enjoyed no special status but were treated in all respects on the same plane as other citizens both Hindus and Moslems.

The discovery of the Cape route to India by Vasco da Gama in 1498 A.D. made for the appearance of the Portuguese on the Malabar and Konkan coasts for the purposes of trade. Heavy dividends were realised by the sale of the products brought by da Gama to Portugal on his return, and a second expedition was sent out in 1500 A.D. under Pedro Alvarez Cabral which however met with stiff opposition from the Muslim or Moors of Calicut known as the Mopilas or Moplas, the progeny of Arabs who had intermarried with the women of the country and who held the monopoly of the spice trade, the principal ports besides Calicut being Cranganore and Cochin. Cabral not to be deterred, obtained a footing at Cochin, the Raja permitting him to use the port and later granting a site about a mile away from the town. where a Portuguese settlement was founded(1). The Deccan and Saurashtra trade was also the monopoly of the Muslims, the principal Muslim ports being Dabul (Mustaphabad) and Goa under the Control of the Bijapur Sultanate, Chaul (Revdanda) under Ahmednagar, and Bassein, Diu and Cambay under Gujerat. Indian products were carried in Muslim ships from the ports mentioned via the Red Sea to Suez, transported over-

(1) Padmanabha Menon—History of Kerala—Vol. II. pp. 128 seq.
Note—The Raja of Cochin at the time is said to have been the hereditary enemy of the Zamorin of Calicut. See Madras Gazetteer, Vol. I, 1908. Malabar & Amjengo Chap. XV. p. 403.

land by the Egyptians under the Mamelukas (Turks) to Alexandria on the Mediterranean, the Venetians being the carriers from Alexandria to various European ports.

The Portuguese in attempting to secure the trade wholly in their hands came in violent conflict with Bijapur first, and then Gujarat. They swept the seas with their powerful fleets; captured Goa in 1510 A.D. and made it the seat of the Portuguese Viceroy. They burnt Dabul on many occasions and put it out of commission, put to rout the forces of Gujarat on the high seas, although fighting ships and soldiers were sent to Gujarat's aid by the Turks. Gujerat made peace in 1534 A.D. and Diu and Bassein were ceded to the Portuguese and an annual subsidy paid for protecting the small remnant of the commerce that was carried on in various other petty ports on the Gujerat coast(1).

Ahmednagar from the beginning, opened its doors to the Portuguese at Chaul. In 1508 A.D. Lorenzo de Almeida made his appearance at the port with a fleet of cargo ships. He was made welcome by the Muslim governor. In the decade 1512-1521 facilities having been granted for a permanent Portuguese settlement, a handsome suburb, with stately villas, gardens, churches and convents known as Lower Chaul, came into existence. This was connected to the Muslim City by a broad avenue. Although it is recorded that after Goa was made an archbishopric in 1560 A.D. and converts to the Roman Catholic faith were sought for with great vigour, the citizens of the Ahmednagar Sultanate were not interfered with, Hindus, Moslems as well as the Beni-Israel(2). On the other hand the Portuguese on payment of a subsidy by the sultan, undertook to pro-

(1) Vincent Smith—Oxford history of India, p. 269.

(2) Kyd Nairne—The Konkan pp. 39, 41, 46, 52, 54 & 61. Danvers—The Portuguese in India. Vol. I. Introduction p. 36.

tect Muslim Pilgrim ships proceeding to Mecca for the Haj from the Deccan and Konkan, Muslims after the capture of Goa, resorting in greater numbers to Chaul which was the only port open to them for the purpose.

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PART III

CHAPTER SIX

PIRATICAL ACTIVITIES OFF THE MALABAR AND KONKAN COASTS.

When Bassein was ceded by Gujarat to the Portuguese in 1534 A.D. one of the conditions for affording protection to the sultan's Commerce was that all shipping making use of the sultan's ports, were to be in possession of Portuguese passes permitting them to trade. This stipulation, as the Portuguese gained ascendancy, was made applicable to all shipping using the sea lanes off the Malabar and Konkan coastal sea-boards and was enforced by means of two fleets of warships, one operating in the northern and the other in the southern sectors. All shipping not possessing a pass were treated as pirates and dealt with accordingly. As the Portuguese levied heavy dues for both passes and port facilities and as ships were required to proceed to Bassein to obtain them, local interests which had hitherto enjoyed free trade facilities for centuries defied the Portuguese mandate and took many risks including armed attacks on real or supposedly Portuguese ships which patrolled the sea-lanes to check whether passes were held or not. Many of the local interests which carried on a trade in smalls from one petty port to another, or even to major ports, were hard hit and harassed and treated as pirates. This brought about chaos and piracy took root along both the Malabar and Konkan coasts. The numerous creeks which dot these shores and which the larger ships of the Portuguese were unable to penetrate, were the main refuge of the sea-robbers. To clear their nests the Portuguese sent small expeditions inland which indiscriminately burnt villages and towns in the vicinity of the creeks doing

much damage and otherwise ill-treating, and massacring the inhabitants if they met with opposition. As such expeditions penetrated into the interior as far as the Sayadhari hills, the people displaced, having been deprived of their belongings and means of livlihood, banded themselves together, acquired vessels by force or treachery and found it more profitable to rob, plunder and murder on the high seas than follow peaceful pursuits.

The first European filibuster in Indian waters was Vincente Sodre, Captain of the flag-ship "Sao Jeroymo" in which Vasco da Gama came with a fleet of 20 ships on his second voyage to India. When Da Gama left, Sodre was assigned the task of destroying the ships of the Moors of Calicut sailing for the Red Sea with cargoes of spices or capture Muslim pilgrim ships which were held for ransom(1). Sodre early in this venture lost his life and his ships in a storm off the Curia Muria Islands off the Arabian coast where he had put in to refit(2).

The so called Malabar pirates were composed of Moors (Mopilas-Muslims) of Calicut, Gentus (gentiles or Hindus) Jews apparently from Cochin and Christians (converts), the Arabs later joining the fraternity. Their activities were prominent as from 1570 A.D. The so-called picaroons however, are described as honest merchants in reality, engaged in legitimate trade in which their ancestors for ages had established interests. They were despoiled on the high seas actually by interlopers. mostly discharged and deserted Portuguese soldiery and seamen, who banded themselves together, assumed an attitude of authority they did not possess and committed acts of violence and spoilation innately brutal. That

(1) Danvers—The Portuguese in India. Vol. I. Chapter IV.
(2) Biddulph—The Pirates of Malabar, pp. 1 & 2.

these outrages covered a considerable period may be inferred from the fact recorded that Portuguese officials in high places were not averse to share in the spoils thereby encouraging and prolonging a state of affairs which legitimately they should have suppressed as a matter of duty at the very outset(1).

The advantages the Portuguese initially possessed by their superiority at sea were progressively reduced. They were unable to effectively control the vast seaboard extending from Cambay in Gujerat to Cape Comorin in the south, the forces at their command being inadequate. The Portuguese made not only Chaul the principal port for the entrepot trade of the Deccan but also their chief naval station and arsenal(2). The challenge to Portuguese supremacy in the Indian seas came mainly from their European rivals, the Dutch and the English, both maritime powers. The Dutch East India Company and the British East India Company both trading corporations, came early into being. The Dutch gained a footing on the Malabar coast ultimately wresting Cochin from the Portuguese and concentrating their main Indian trade interests at the port. The British obtained concessions from the Moguls at Surat and eventually emerged as the paramount power. The pirate fraternity as a consequence of the rivalry amongst the Europeans, flourished. Indian as well as European cargo ships were indiscriminately attacked and plundered in the Arabian Sea and the annual Muslim pilgrim exodus to Jidda for the Haj, seriously menaced.

The weakening of the Ahmednagar and Bijapur kingdoms consequent on the invasion of their territories by the Moguls, conferred a semi-independent status on the

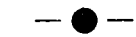
(1) Kyd Nairne—The Konkan, p. 56.
(2) Dr. Gerson da Cunha—Notes on the history and antiquities of Chaul. p. 82.

Abyssinians in a remote corner of the Ahmednagar dominions. In 1596 A.D. the Moguls during the reign of Akbar, over-ran Ahmednagar but it was not till four years later, after a heroic defence by the famous Chand Bibi, the dowager queen of Bijapur, and after her death, that the kingdom was annexed by the Moguls. A Mogul governor thereafter replaced the Abyssinians at Janjira. Mogul sovereignty however was only nominal as the greater portion of the Ahmednagar dominions under the able guidance of Malik Ambar, the famous Abyssinian prime minister, still enjoyed an independent status under a puppet princeling who was enthroned, Kharki (now named Aurangabad) being the capital. Malik Ambar later succeeded in replacing the Mogul governor at Janjira by an Abyssinian, one Siddi Simbh; he was succeeded by Siddi Yakub in 1620 A.D. Siddi Amber surnamed Sanak or the little, replaced Siddi Yakub in 1621 A.D. On the death of Malik Ambar in 1626 A.D. his son. Faithe Khan who succeeded him, was in 1632 A.D. bought over by the Moguls. Ahmednagar thus became an appanage of the Mogul Empire under the emperor Jehangir. By the treaty of partition (1636) Bijapur, which had also surrendered its independence under pressure of the Mogul armies, was given the port of Danda-Rajpuri. The abyssinian governor at Janjira was appointed as Wazir or Viceroy on condition that he maintained an effective fleet to protect the pilgrim traffic to Jidda, the territory from Nagotna to Bankot being allotted for revenue purposes to the new satrap(1).

The drastic steps taken by the Portuguese to eliminate pirate nests on the Bombay coastal belt north of Habsan, compelled the Beni-Israel to move into the

(1) Gazetteer, Bombay Presidency. Vol. I. Part II. pp. 589-590. Vincent Smith—Oxford history of India pp. 290, 363, 380 & 384.

interior to the east and south-east within the territorial limits of the Ahmednagar kingdom. Malik Ambar the prime minister at about the time herein, appointed several Beni-Israel as revenue farmers, the Ashtamkers more generally known as the "Mehtas" being the most prominent, their activities being centered at Roha Ashtami where their descendants are still resident and where they own extensive lands and engage in commercial pursuits(1). Janjira gradually emerged as a formidable seapower in the latter half of the seventeenth century. The large revenues that accrued to the Abyssinian viceroy, enabled him to construct and acquire ships built on the European model, armaments and munitions being obtained from the Portuguese at Chaul and from the Moguls at Surat. It is evident that the Beni-Israel in Habsan benefited considerably from these activities. Many of them were clever artisans, especially as carpenters, whose services were in great demand and who were well paid. This incidentally confirms the statement recorded in the Bombay Gazetteer that they were found in greater numbers in the Hubshee's enclave in the early eighteenth century where the Siddi was powerful and Danda Rajpuri was a centre of trade(2).



(1) Khemikar—History of the Beni-Israel of the Bombay Presidency. pp. 81-82.
(2) *Note*—See chapter I.

PART III

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ASCENDENCY OF THE MARATHAS IN THE BOMBAY KONKAN.

Under the Treaty of Partition of 1636 A.D. the Bijapur Sultanate, which had surrendered its independence to the Moguls at Delhi, was allotted the Deccan enclave south of the Bhima river. Shahaji Bhonsle, a Hindu noble, who had rendered valuable services to the Bijapur Sultan in the Mogul campaign, was, as a reward, given a jagir consisting of Poona and Supa and later Indapur and Baramati and the Maval country(1)(2). Shivaji, Shahaji Bhonsle's son, was installed at Poona to look after the jagir under the supervision of Jiji-Bai, Shivaji's mother and Shahaji's wife.

The young Maratha Chieftain Shivaji thus, in his formative years, came in constant contact with other Maratha nobles round about his father's jagir. Under the loose hegemony of Bijapur these enjoyed a more or less independent status; they maintained considerable armed forces; on occasion when it suited their interests, they sold their swords for a price, although nominally their arms were intended solely for defence and for reinforcing the main standing armies of the Muslim overlords in time of war; their cavalry known as Bargis, enjoyed a high reputation for their fighting qualities and

(1) *Note*—The Maval region comprises the elevated plateau immediately adjoining the Sayadhari range to the west and is so called as the sun first sets in this area before sinking to the lower plains below the hilly ranges separating the Konkan from the Deccan. Maval proper is 20 to 40 miles in breadth and approximately a 100 miles in length. It is inhabited in the north by the Kolis. Mahadeo Kolis pre-dominating, and the south chiefly by Maratha Kumbis or cultivators. The population is generally designated "Mavalis".

(2) Gazetteer Bombay Presidency, Vol. I. Part II. pp. 590-91.

turned the scale in many an intestine conflict, a resort to arms for settling disputes between rival minor chiefs being common(1).

Muslim rule in the Deccan and the Konkan having been weakened by Mogul pressure, Shivaji, a born leader, took the opportunity to unite the Marathas and made a bold bid for freedom and national independence. His initial military successes were gained in the period 1646 to 1648 A.D. when he was only 19 years old. His first gains were the capture of strategic fortresses among them, "Torma", 20 miles south west of Poona where he discovered a large treasure. This enabled him to better equip his followers with arms. His military activities were at first not taken much notice of; the seizure however, of a large quantity of gold on its way to Bijapur from Kalyan, an important port with an extensive trade, the sack of Kalyan and the commercial towns round about where rich booty was secured and the capture of some of the hill forts in the Konkan which he penetrated, greatly alarmed Bijapur. His father was thereupon imprisoned. The Emperor Shah Jehan intervened on Shivaji professing loyalty to Delhi and his readiness together with his father, to forthwith enter the Mogul emperor's service—Shahaji was released after a durance of four years during which Shivaji's activities were inconspicuous. The forts he had captured however remained more or less under his stewardship having been manned by Marathas faithful to his cause.

Shortly after Shahaji's release, Shivaji renewed his military activities. A Bijapur force sent under Afzal Khan, an experienced general, to rout Shivaji out of his fastnesses was defeated by the Maratha chieftain near Pratapgarh (Javli-Wai-Satara) 1659 A.D., Afzal Khan

(1) Rawlinson (H.G.) Shivaji, p. 23.

being killed by Shivaji. A large booty was secured. This success made for Shivaji to be hailed as a liberator throughout the country-side. The capture of Rairee, afterwards Raigarh, in the same year, from the Abyssinian governor and which was later converted into an impregnable fortress and made Shivaji's capital, was followed by conquests on the Konkan sea-board upto Danda at the entrance of the Rajpuri Mahasla creek by the Maratha general, Ragunath Atre, who captured important forts at Tale, Ghosale and other places. The whole coastal regions were organised into an administrative province under an able viceroy, one Vynaikji Datoo, with a permanent fighting force of 7000 men. This army defeated the Siddi of Janjira in a great land battle. The Siddi's Jagir, Naghotna to Bankot, was annexed; the Siddi's attempts to retake it being foiled many times, forts having been erected by the Marathas at Birwadi, Singana and other places to check any further depredations of the Siddi. It is asserted that the Siddis "to fill their stomachs" took to piracy on the high seas, the fortress of Janjira and its immediate environs to an inconsiderable extent only being in their possession(1).

The conquests of Shivaji further south extended to the borders of Goa including the small state of Wari (Sawantwadi). To protect the coastal regions from attacks by sea, Shivaji formulated plans for building a strong Maratha navy. Malwan now in the Ratnagiri District, was selected as the chief Naval station, Severndroog, Ratnagiri, Jaigarh, Anjanwal, Vizaidroog (Ghecia) and Kolaba (Now Ali-bag) being made auxiliary bases with strong defensive sea-forts. Kolaba in special, was selected to curb the activities of the Janjira fleet and plund-

(1) Vincent Smith—Oxford History of India, pp. 425, 426 & 436.
Kyd Nairne—The Konkan. p. 54.
Sarkar—Shivaji. pp. 245-246.

er rich Mogul ships from Surat. Ship yards were built and war vessels were constructed at all the places herein(1). The port of Chaul including both the Muslim and Portuguese enclaves, was systematically attacked and destroyed by the Marathas and by 1672 A.D. it was in ruins. Dabul was already in ruins having been burnt by the Portuguese on many occasions since 1508 A.D. onwards. The trade of Goa having fallen off to negligible proportions after the defeat of Vijayanagar at the battle of Talicots in 1565 A.D. the Portuguese held only Bassein in Salsette from where they were enabled to carry on the Indo-European trade(2). Danda Rajpuri thus came into prominence as the main centre and port for the entrepot trade of the Deccan replacing Goa and Cheul.

The war with the Moguls 1662-1680 A.D. isolated the Konkan from Muslim inroads. After Afzal Khan's defeat, Bijapur being reduced to a temporary state of helplessness, Shivaji's forces ravaged the Mogul Dominions. Shaista Khan, the Victory of the Deccan provinces and an experienced general, was alloted the task by the Emperor Aurangzebe to stop the Maratha inroads. His forces were put to rout by the Marathas, Shaista Khan narrowly escaping with his life, Shivaji in person boldly attacking the general in the house at Poona where Shivaji was brought up and which Shaista Khan had occupied. Shivaji sacked Surat in 1662 A.D. and secured a large booty. Shivaji's navy which had gradually come into being and which harassed the coastal shipping waylaid the vessels from Surat conveying Mecca pilgrims. Aurangzebe in retaliation for the outrage, sent a very strong Mogul force to punish the Marathas and destroy their mountain fastnesses. Fort after Maratha fort was taken and Shivaji was compelled to sue for peace. By

(1) V. Smith—Oxford History of India, p. 434.
Kyd Nairne—The Konkan pp. 57|63 & 69.
(2) Kyd Nairne—The Konkan pp. 57, 63 & 69.

the treaty of Purandhar, Shivaji was permitted to retain only 10 forts with villages in the vicinity of each as a jagir; for affording protection to the people he was also granted the right to levy "chauth" or ¼ of the land revenues in certain districts of the Bijapur kingdom, 1665 A.D.(1).

After the treaty of Purandhar, Shivaji repaired to the Imperial Court at Delhi to make peace with the Mogul Emperor in person. The redoubtable Maratha chieftain however was treated with scant respect and was kept under strict surveillance. He managed to escape after 9 months and resumed his hostilities against the Moguls — 1666 A.D. He recovered his lost territories and compelled Golconda and Bijapur to pay tribute — 1668 A.D.

Surat was sacked by Shivaji for the second time in 1670 A.D. The continued successes of the Maratha armies made Shivaji to aspire to absolute independence. Accordingly on his return to Raigarh from his Mogul campaigns Shivaji was crowned king with great pomp in April 1674 A.D.(2). He thereafter invaded the Carnatic, captured many important towns, including Vellore, returning to Raigarh in 1679. He died in 1680 after a brief illness.

The liberation of the Bombay Konkan from the Portuguese and Muslim yoke made for the return to their ancestral villages of the displaced inhabitants who had taken refuge in various places inland and elsewhere, including the Beni-Israel. Old homes burnt or destroyed, were restored and reoccupied and former owners of land again cultivated their fields and which were in possession

(1) Sinclair—History of India, pp. 103.

(2) Vincent Smith—Oxford history of India, p. 129.

of their fathers for generations; various cottage industries including oil pressing were revived.

The liberal Maratha administration brought about many beneficial changes. Shivaji divided his kingdom into fourteen prants or districts, each prant consisting of several groups of villages; forts in the environs of each district ensured the safety of the inhabitants from robbers as well as raids from adjoining hostile elements. Each prant officer not only collected the revenues imposed but decided all criminal cases, the village panchayats consisting of five respected elders handling civil matters, decisions in respect of which were strictly enforced. The revenue system was based on the actual productiveness of the soil and not arbitrarily, 2|5th being the amount payable to the state. Rent farmers and their intermediaries who plundered the peasantry, were done away with, prant officers appointing special staff of proved integrity to collect the revenue. The "Ashti Pradhan" or council of eight, appointed by the King with the Peshwa or chief minister at the head, each Councillor administering a separate department of government, controlled all the subordinate officers. Malpractices were thus able to be kept in effective check. These measures considerate and humane, brought in its train contentment and prosperity to the countryside oppressed and harassed by centuries of misrule(1).

To ensure the unhampered development of Danda Rajpuri as a major port under Maratha aegis to replace Cheul (Cheul was in ruins by 1672 A.D.) Shivaji in 1670 A.D. made a bid to capture Janjira. The Abyssinians were inclined to accept an offer of a large bribe and a rich jagir for giving up the sea-fortress. Dissensions among them led to an appeal for aid being made

(1) Takakhas—Life of Shivaji Maharaj, p. 384 etc.

to the Moguls who promptly responded. The Janjira fleet was nominally transferred to Mogul control; an Abyssinian was appointed as admiral and three lakhs of rupees assigned annually from the revenues of Surat for its maintenance(1). The Siddi chief was required to protect Mogul merchant ships on the high seas and the fleet carrying Muslim devotees for the annual Haj to Mecca. The Siddi thereupon took active steps to strengthen his position in the Konkan; war material was procured from the Moguls at Surat and the strength of the vessels increased. The Siddis repeatedly seized Maratha ships, cut off the heads of the Marathas and sent them as trophies to Surat. In 1671 A.D. they succeeded in re-capturing Danda Rajpuri. During the Shimga or Spring festival when the Marathas were drinking and making merry, the governor at Janjira made his way secretly with 40 ships to Danda Rajpuri while the army commander with 500 men made a noisy feint on the landward side. The Marathas taken by surprise rushed in force to that side. The Siddis from the ships scaled the sea-walls of the defences on the sea-front and gained a footing in the citadel and a fierce hand to hand engagement ensued. The Maratha commander was killed. The magazine blew up killing both Siddis and Marathas. Danda was captured and the Siddis sovereignty restored over the port(2).

The infiltration of the Beni-Israel from the adjoining Habsan enclaves into Danda Rajpuri appears to have occured both during its occupation by the Marathas and after the fort was retaken by the Hubshee more specially perhaps, after the latter event. The Marathas apparently in the interests of the large volume of the inland trade, after Shivaji's death in 1680 A.D. and the

(1) Bombay Gazetteer—Vol. XI. Colaba and Janjira. p. 437.
(2) Sarkar—Shivaji, p. 252.

dissensions that arose in respect of the succession, relaxed any barriers to free trade at the port that may have been in existence. The fact recorded by Dr. Wilson that the Cochin Jews told him that they first contacted the Beni-Israel at Danda Rajpuri(1) indicates that the Cochin Jews were traders at the port. The acquisition of Cochin by the Dutch in 1662 A.D. and the elimination of Chaul about 1672 A.D., made for Danda Rajpuri to replace Chaul as the only entrepot trade centre for the trade with the Deccan. After the sack of Mattancheri or Jews—Town at Cochin by the Portuguese in 1661 A.D. and the loss of their wealth and reduction in their numbers in consequence, the Cochinis were impelled in their search for new avenues for trade, to resort under the protection of the Dutch, to the nearest port which offered prospects of commercial gain. Danda—Rajpuri offered scope to the enterprising Cochinis and to their surprise they found members of a sister community to their own, long established in the Konkan who called themselves Beni-Israel. After ascertaining their history and satisfying themselves that they were indeed a limb of ancient Israel settled for centuries on Indian soil still adhering to the religious dogma of the Israelites of old and exemplified by the repetition of the "Kiryat Shema" on all religious occasions, they arranged to send in their midst as soon as they possibly could, a pious Jewish teacher to bring about a religious revival. Thus it was, after remaining in isolation from people of their own faith for centuries, that David Rahabi came amongst them, an event destined to bring about vast changes in their lives.

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(1) Dr. John Wilson—Lands of the Bible, Vol. II. p. 676.

PART III

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BOMBAY KONKAN AFTER THE DEATH OF SHIVAJI

The political sway of the Marathas over the Bombay Konkan excluding the Janjira enclave, lasted for nearly 170 years from 1648 A.D. to the final surrender of the Peshwa Baji Rao II to the English in 1818 A.D. The coastal regions throughout were in a state of continual ferment. The Maratha and Janjira fleets were the watch-dogs of rival trade interests and piratical spoilation by both on the high seas was not an uncommon feature. In Habsan, the Beni-Israel under the Siddi government, appear to have been better off than in the adjacent Maratha regions. The steady development of Danda Rajpuri as the main entrepot port for the trade of the Deccan replacing Chaul, offered new and profitable vocations not the least of which was the repair and re-conditioning of both warships and merchantmen and the building of new vessels, the Rajpuri Mahasla creek being the main anchorage of the Siddi's fleet as well as merchant craft. The Hubshee being in an impregnable position with Janjira citadel commanding the entrance to the creek and a powerful fleet at his back, was in a position to dictate terms to the Marathas in respect of the use of Danda Rajpuri Port only such merchant craft as was not hostile to the commercial interests of the port being permitted to make use of it, citizens of both the Hubshee's and Maratha territories freely trading at the port. The commercial gains doubtless were an important factors in coming to some such arrangement mutually satisfactory from the business point of view. It may be added that the European pirate fraternity of all nations had also made its appearance

in the Indian seas, their rendezvous being the island of Madagaskar on the east coast of Africa, which offered innumerable hide-outs in the many inland creeks which studded the coast. It is stated that the notorious English pirates Captains Kidd and Henry Every (Evory) were also conspicuous. Richly laden East Indiamen were the prey and the commercial losses suffered especially by the English, were enormous. The Indian Red Sea fleet offered rich prizes. The vessels which carried Indian Muslim merchants and pilgrims which set out for the Red Sea ports and Jidda, on their return journey, invited attack as they had realised large sums in payment for trade goods and for carrying pilgrims, mostly married men and who when captured, were held for ransom(1). It thus came about that the European mercantile interests sent groups of ships in convoy, this practice being also adopted by Indian traders.

After the death of Shivaji in 1680 A.D. the Mogul Emperor Aurangezebe subjugated and annexed the Muslim sultanates of Golconda and Bijapur to the Mogul empire. In the same campaign to check the menace of the growing Maratha power, he captured and put to death Sambaji, Shivaji's successor (1688 A.D.). Sambaji's son Shahu, was spared and brought up at the Delhi court being appointed as mansubder (Commander) of 700 horse. The Marathas thereupon elected Rajaram, Sambaji's brother, as regent to carry on the Maratha government. On his death, his widow, Tarabai, an able and energetic woman, was appointed to the regency. She harassed the Moguls and gave them no peace from the temporary capital at Satara(2).

Rajaram in 1698 A.D. appointed one Conaji (Khonaji) Angria as admiral of the formidable Maratha fleet

(1) Biddulph—The pirates of Malabar, pp. 80 & 83.
(2) Vincent Smith—Oxford History of India, pp. 442 to 444.

brought into being by Shivaji. Conajee plundered native merchant vessels and sacked minor ports on the Konkan and Malabar coasts as far south as Travancore. In 1710 A.D. he occupied and fortified Kennery Island off Bombay and thus menaced British shipping from Surat and Bombay. By 1711 A.D. he was reputed to be able to seize any ship except the largest European vessels(1).

On the death of Aurangezeb in 1707 A.D., Bahadur Shah, his successor, released Shahu afterwards Shivaji II. The civil war between Shahu's and Tara Bai's adherents led to a division of authority Shahu establishing himself at Satara and Tara Bai at Kholapur(2). Thereupon Conajee declared his independence. An army sent under Bhyroo Pant, the Peshwa, to bring him to terms, was defeated and Bhyroo Pant made a prisoner. Conajee threatened to march on Satara. Balaji Baji Rao who afterwards became Peshwa, was then sent to treat with the rebel. A truce was patched up; in return for Conajee's allegiance to Satara, he was given 26 coastal forts and the villages in the immediate vicinity as a jagir. The most important of the forts were Kennery, Colaba, Vijayadroog (Cheria) and Severndroog. Conajee thus virtually became an independent chieftain of the whole of the Konkan coastal strip excluding the Siddi's enclave of Janjira(3).

Conajee's exploits on the Indian Main are perhaps unique in buccaneering annals. He captured the Governor of Bombay's (Aislabie) armed Yacht in 1712 A.D. A large East Indiaman, the "Success" on its way to England from Surat, was a prey in 1716 A.D. Another

(1) Biddulph—The pirates of Malabar pp. 76 to 78.
(2) V. Smith—Oxford History of India, p. 453.
(3) Biddulph—The pirates of Malabar p. 78.
Kyd Nairne—The Konkan p. 81.

East India-man, the "Otter" from Bengal, was later also a victim. The Bombay Council in retaliation decided to reduce Vijayadroog (Gheria) Conajee's chief stronghold on the Konkan sea-board. Beyond plundering one town and destroying another in the Angria's territory, the British forces withdrew to Bombay "to repair our frigates and take care of our wounded of whom we had a considerable number". In 1760 A.D. a combined English and Portuguese expedition against Gheria failed to make an impression; 16 vessels in the river only being burnt(1). The Dutch thereafter, in 1724 A.D., tried their hand against Gheria with the same result. The action against Gheria by the three European maratime powers engaged in the Indian trade, connotes that European merchant shipping was the principal objective of Conajee's activities, rich booty being the lure, the series of failures to reduce his stronghold made the pirate chieftain more daring; his career came to an end when he died in 1728 A.D.(2).

Conajee's inheritance was divided between his two sons Shakhajee taking over Colaba (Alibag) and Sambajee, Severndroog. Both carried on the "predatory activities of their late parent". Sakhajee having died in 1734 A.D. Sambajee assumed control over the whole of the jagir nominating his half brothers Manajee and Yessajee—his father's illegitimate sons—to hold Colaba on his behalf. Manajee having fallen out with Yessajee and Sambajee, captured Colaba with the assistance of the Portuguese and after putting out the eyes of his brother Yessajee, imprisoned him. When the Portuguese with-

(1) Biddulph—The pirates of Malabar pp. 34, 99 and 102. Kyd Nairne—The Konkan p. 80. Kyd Nairne gives the date 1717 A.D. as the year of the joint expedition instead of 1720 as given by Biddulph.

(2) *Note*—Biddulph in his 'Pirates of Malabar' gives the year 1729 A.D. as Conajee's death p. 203.

drew, Sambajee from Severndroog attacked Colaba. Manajee this time enlisted the Peshwa in his cause by offering his allegiance. Sambajee thereupon retired. The Marathas under the Peshwa Baji Rao, having composed their differences with Kholapur by a treaty in 1731 A.D., were animated by a desire to bring the whole of the Konkan under their sway. They failed however to take Janjira which they attacked in 1733 A.D. On the death of the reigning Siddi and the dissension among his sons regarding the succession, the Peshwa successfully intervened, Siddi Rahaman being elected chief(1). In 1737 A.D. the Portuguese who had come to the succour of Manaji Angria against Sambaji and had been promised certain territory in compensation for their aid, and which promise Manaji failed to fulfil, approached Sambaji and with his concurrence, if not active assistance, attacked Colaba. The Peshwa having sent a force to assist Manaji, the Portuguese withdrew. This belligerent attitude of the Portuguese, the proclivity of the over-zealous Paulistines to convert Hindus to the Roman Catholic faith and the terrors of the Inquisition, offered sufficient excuse to the Marathas to invade the Portuguese possessions in Salsette. The whole of the island was occupied by the Marathas and many sacred Christian edifices destroyed. Thana with its strong fortress, was reduced and Bassein occupied in 1739. Manaji Angria operating on the sea front captured sea going craft both Portuguese and others, and occupied Karanjia Island opposite Bombay which was a strong Portuguese stronghold. Sambaji taking advantage of the confusion emerged with his fleet from Vijadroog to prey on the coastal shipping. The English being on the alert destroyed 22 of his vessels and inflicted

(1) Biddulph—The Pirates of Malabar, p. 213.

(2) Biddulph—The Pirates of Malabar, p. 213.

much damage to other ships which had taken refuge in the Rajpuri creek killing the admiral. Further hostilities ceased through the good offices of Chimnaji Appa, the Peshwa's brother(2).

After the capture of Bassein in 1739 A.D., the Marathas entered into a treaty of friendship with the English whereby "inter alia" they were permitted to trade in the Maratha dominions. The piratical activity of Sambaji from Gheria were a standing menace to the coastal trade. The Dutch at about this time attacked his stronghold with seven ships of war and an equal no of sloops but failed to make an impression. Emboldened, Sambaji attacked Manaji and having bought over Manaji's officers, captured Alibag and Thull. Manaji sought the aid of the English who promptly responded and sent five ships. Sambaji's vessels escaped to Severndroog, a land force of 2000 men sent by the Peshwa completing his discomfiture. Sambaji died in 1743 A.D. Toolaji, Sambaji's half brother succeeding him as chief.

The piratical activities of Toolaji were on as active a scale as his predecessor. From 1750 to 1754 he had become so powerful that his fleet continuously harassed the merchant shipping from Cutch to Cochin. Many efforts were made to check his depredations notably one by the Dutch in 1754 but no decisive result was achieved. Elated by his successes, Toolaji then threw off his allegiance to the Peshwa cutting off the noses of the Peshwa's agents who came to collect the usual tribute. Thereupon the Sirsoobah or governor of the Konkan, Ramajee Pant, sought the assistance of the English. A joint expedition attacked Severndroog by land and sea and captured the fortress. Bankote surrendered and a demonstration in force off Ratnagiri passed off without

incident. The approach of the monsoon brought about a suspension of the operations.

Reinforcements having arrived from England including the famous Robert Clive, hostilities were resumed after the monsoon, the English being promised the cession of Bankote as compensation for any losses they would sustain. Gheria was invested both by land and sea, by the combined forces of the Marathas and English. Toolaji fled and surrendered to the Peshwa and was imprisoned for life. The garrison however, offered a stout resistance but the stronghold was reduced and captured. The Marathas retained Gheria—Bankote with ten adjoining villages were assigned to the British in perpetuity. This was the first territory acquired by England on the Konkan coast and later became the main recruiting centre for the Bombay Native Armies and which the Beni-Israel joined in large numbers(1).

It was during the regime of the Marathas in the Konkan that the population increased, merchants, cultivators and others descending from the Deccan into these regions attracted by the peaceful living conditions and the opportunities of honest gain open to them in various fields of legitimate endeavour. The many upheavals on the Konkan sea-board, the actions at sea being the more numerous, affected the coastal population to a negligible extent. The Beni-Israel in Habsan and Colaba inconspicuous in numbers, were as well if not, better off, than their neighbours. They were able to dispose off their field produce and oil products to advantage as they were in great demand locally, rival agents of the sowears or established merchants, scouring the country-side for supplies to meet the demands of the local army and the sea rovers. The shipyards large and small that sprang up,

(1) Kyd Nairne—The Konkan p. 92.

afforded employment in several places to many of them. Some of the more adventurous entered the Angrias and Hubshees naval forces, a few attaining the rank of Commodore as recorded by Kehimkar(1). That their number was small may reasonably be inferred from the fact that the Angria welcomed in his service deserters from European ships mainly Portuguese and Dutch, many ships being commanded especially by the latter(2). Shivaji's seamen were recruited at Malwan and on the Ratnagiri coast more generally; Muslims predominated in the Hubshee's navy. That press gang methods were employed as in some European countries to forcibly impress unwilling men as seamen is not borne out by the history of the times. The sole attraction was gain, with the best part of the plunder being appropriated by the chief and his principal lieutenants; the share of the smaller fry could not have been such as to prove a strong lure. The risks were not worth the small gains that would accrue to those in the lower ranks and that the Beni-Israel at any period entertained a partiality for joining the Naval services of both the Angrias and the Hubshee is not evident(3).

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(1) Kehimkar—History of the Beni-Israel of the Bombay Presidency. pp. 79, 80 & 188.

(2) Biddulph—The Pirates of Malabar, pp. 80 & 83.

(3) *Note*—The Angrias Wada or official residence, about ¾th of a mile north of the Alibag town on rising ground, has several adjoining structures obviously used for the storage of plunder and equipment and munitions of war captured in pirate raids. Provision for a reserve of cereals and other raw food stuffs in quantity, apparently also existed side by side as the size of the group of buildings, in a state of disrepair, is on a very generous scale.

The anchorage for the Angria's fleet of ships was in the lagoon shaped large inland sheet of water to the east and to which access was to be only had via the somewhat narrow creek commanded by the fort on the west sea-front still in existence and now converted into a Police barracks. This anchorage now completely silted up in parts, at the present is used by the local fishing fleet.

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